Gaze toward paradise: Hart Crane and the poetry of quest

Buckingham, Mary

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A thesis submitted in September 2003
for the degree of PhD
to the University of Durham

Mary Buckingham

Department of English Studies

Abstract

Hart Crane's poetry has always been the subject of widely differing views. In recent years, after a long period of neglect, there has been an attempt to find a new sense of the poetry's meaning and value. There have been notable biographical and contextual works by Paul Mariani (2000) and Paul Giles (1986) as well as provocative studies which dwell upon Crane's sexuality, but there is still scope for a work that concentrates in detail upon Crane's themes of quest and the inspirational importance of the female 'other' he pursues. This thesis seeks to develop the tradition of close reading of Crane established by R.W.B. Lewis (1967) and Sherman Paul (1972). Where it differs from these excellent studies is in the emphasis laid upon the theme of quest and, in particular, the stress on the interplay between those different impulses which form the basis of Crane's finest work. The thesis tracks Hart Crane's gaze toward some idea of betterment, the other side of which is Hell. It concentrates mainly, but not entirely, on Crane's longer poems in the belief that in these works his major successes are found. After an introduction which explains the aim and approach of the thesis, what follows are studies of the poems. Chapter one examines 'For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen,' while chapter two explores 'Voyages.' Chapter three is the first of four chapters upon Crane's major achievement, The Bridge; it introduces the poem and examines the first two sections. The fourth, fifth and sixth chapters follow Crane on his journey through the poem. The thesis is brought to a conclusion in a coda which argues that the difficulties associated with reading Crane should be re-assessed.

Contents

Declaration and Statement of Copyright

The research presented in this thesis is the original work of the author, unless stated otherwise. None of this work has been submitted for a degree in this or any other university.

Acknowledgements

My thanks to Professor Michael O' Neill for his help and patience and to the University of Durham for a two year studentship.

Love and thanks to Chris, who has supported me emotionally, financially and technically through this thesis.

To my family, Tanya and Sam, Paul and Tracey, and the next generation of Zoe, Katie and Leon.

Last but not least, my mother and my father.

List of Abbreviations.

Works by Hart Crane

CP Complete Poems of Hart Crane. Ed. Marc Simon. Rpt. of The Poems of Hart Crane. 1989. New York: Liveright, 1993.

LHC The Letters of Hart Crane: 1916-1932. Ed. Brom Weber. Berkeley: U of California P, 1965.

CPSL The Complete Poems and Selected Letters and Prose of Hart Crane. Ed. Brom Weber. New York: Anchor-Doubleday, 1966.

'For The Marriage of Faustus and Helen'

F&H 1 'For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen I'

F&H 2 'For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen II'

F&H 3 'For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen III'

'Voyages'

V-1 'Voyages I'

V-2 'Voyages II'

V-3 'Voyages III'

V-4 'Voyages IV'

V-5 'Voyages V'

V-6 'Voyages VI'

The Bridge

AM	'Ave Maria' (Section I)
At	'Atlantis' (Section VIII)
CH	'Cape Hatteras' (Section IV)
CS	'Cutty Sark' (Section III)
Dan	'The Dance' ('Powhatan's Daughter,' Section II)
HD	The Harbor Dawn' ('Powhatan's Daughter,' Section II)
Ind	'Indiana' ('Powhatan's Daughter,' Section II)
NWG	'National Winter Gardens' ('Three Songs,' Section V)
QH	'Quaker Hill' (Section VI)
Riv	'The River' (From 'Powhatan's Daughter,' Section II)
SC	'Southern Cross' (From 'Three Songs,' Section V)
TBB	'To Brooklyn Bridge' ('Proem' to The Bridge)
Tun	'The Tunnel' (Section VII)
TED	'To Emily Dickinson'
Va	'Virginia' (From 'Three Songs,' Section V)
VW	'Van Winkle' (From 'Powhatan's Daughter,' Section II)

Individual poems

AMT	'At Melville's Tomb'
B Tow	'The Broken Tower'
Chap	'Chaplinesque'
Int	'Interior'
KW	'Key West'

Leg	'Legend'
Lege	'Legende'
NL	'North Labrador'
OC	'O Carib Isle'
RR	'Repose of Rivers'
Rec	'Recitative'
WM	'The Wine Menagerie'

Notes on Texts and Citations

If not stated otherwise, I quote from the poems in Complete Poems of Hart Crane, (New York: Liveright, 1993), edited by Marc Simon. Abbreviations refer to the title of the poem while numbers refer to line numbers.

Introduction

'Who asks for me, the Shelley of my age,
must lay his heart out for my bed and board.'[1]

This thesis examines the working of a dominant impulse manifested by Crane's poetry; namely the attempt to sustain imaginative values in a modern age which he viewed as hostile to such values. Central to my explorations is study of the way in which the poet and the role of poetry are presented in Crane's work, especially in three longer poems, 'The Marriage of Faustus and Helen,' 'Voyages,' and The Bridge, in a period described by Waldo Frank as 'one lacking in philosophical synthesis, without a feeling of unity and wholeness in itself, without any shared religious or ideological beliefs which might tend to unify the age.'[2]

This was the world which Crane wanted to transform rather than transcend, a situation rationalized by the poet in a letter to Frank:

> The validity of a work of art is situated in contemporary reality to the extent that the artist must honestly anticipate the realization of his vision in 'action' (as an actively operating principle of communal works and faith), and I don't mean by this that his procedure requires any bona fide evidences directly and

[1] Robert Lowell, Life Studies (London: Faber, 1959) 69.

[2] Brom Weber, Hart Crane: A Biographical and Critical Study (New York: Bodley P, 1948) 217.

personally signalled, nor even any physical signs or portents.[3]

Crane believed that the modern world stifled imagination: 'The tragic quandary (or *agon*) of the modern world derives from the paradoxes that an inadequate system of rationality forces on the living consciousness.'[4] The poet's self-assigned task is to free that same imagination through the medium of the poem. Michael Schmidt believes that this task ends with the poem: 'When his poem is finished—or abandoned—a poet believes he has made a statement, enacted a process or completed an experience which, properly and sensitively approached, will inform, affect, or act upon a reader in a specific way.'[5] While the poems suggest the hope of such an outcome, the importance of the poet's role is at the root of his own belief about the role of the poet.

Crane's belief in his role is summed up in a letter he wrote to Harriet Monroe: 'The nuances of feeling and observation in a poem may well call for certain liberties which you claim the poet has no right to take. I am simply making the claim that the poet does have the authority, and that to deny it is to limit the scope of the medium so considerably as to outlaw some of the richest genius of the past.'[6] Crane's poems seek to rectify his world through vision, a word used in this thesis to mean a powerfully imaginative way of apprehending reality; to depict vision, the poet manipulates traditional symbols of inspiration from past and present to provide what he calls 'scaffolding': 'The

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[3] Brom Weber, ed., The Letters of Hart Crane (Berkeley: U of California P, 1965) 260. Hereafter referred to as LHC.

[4] LHC 238.

[5] Michael Schmidt, Reading Modern Poetry (London: Routledge, 1989) 92.

[6] Brom Weber, ed., The Complete Poems and Selected Letters and Prose of Hart Crane (New York: Anchor-Doubleday, 1966) 235. Hereafter referred to as CPSL.

importance of this scaffolding may easily be exaggerated, but it gave me a series of correspondences between two widely separated worlds on which to sound some major themes of human speculation—love, beauty, death, renascence. It was a kind of grafting process that I shall doubtless not be interested in repeating, but which is consistent with subsequent theories of mine on the relation of tradition to the contemporary creating imagination.'[7] Here, Crane is discussing 'For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen' and, despite his words, the 'grafting process' is repeated in The Bridge.

Crane's long poems are all premised upon the idea of attaining a visionary moment by seeking out a grail whose pursuit requires frequent journeys into the past; the goal remains indefinable, a desire for a form of enrichment that is never spelled out by the poet protagonist as he journeys across time and space. The greater emphasis of the quest is on the forward movement rather than resolution. Bloom, describing the cyclical nature of poems, notes that 'it ends literally at its beginning; it concludes with the choice that provokes its opening line.'[8] While Bloom is specifically describing 'Le Bateau ivre,'[9] his words relate to Crane's longer poems. In similar fashion, Marion Montgomery's account of 'Four Quartets'[10] explains the altered perception of the poet after the quest: 'The change is in Eliot, for it is the same world in both instances. He has arrived where he started but knows the place "for the first time."'[11] Crane too, arrives back at the place of departure, but

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[7] 'General Aims and Theories,' CPSL 217.

[8] Harold Bloom, ed., Arthur Rimbaud (New York: Chelsea House, 1988) 138.

[9] Arthur Rimbaud, Collected Poems, trans Martin Sorrel (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001). Hereafter Rimbaud, CP.

[10] T. S. Eliot, Collected Poems 1909-1962 (London:Faber, 1963). Hereafter Eliot, CP.

[11] Marion Montgomery, T. S. Eliot: An Essay on the American Magus (Athens: U of Georgia P, 1969) 10.

instead of knowing the place 'for the first time,' he is consoled for experiencing a vision which cannot be retained.

Northrop Frye believes that 'in Romanticism the main direction of the quest of identity tends increasingly to be downward and inward, toward a hidden basis or ground of identity between man and nature.'[12] While there is downward movement, the poet tries to hold this in check with his upward gaze. The downward movement that always follows any upward movement is best illustrated by the words of William Carlos Williams in the third part of Book II of Paterson:

> The descent beckons
>
> as the ascent beckoned.[13]

This movement is evidence that the poet knows that there is no final resolution.

Lionel Trilling's explanation, in his essay 'The Poet as Hero: Keats in His Letters,' of Keats's famous phrase, 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty,' argues that 'a great poet (e.g., Shakespeare) looks at human life, sees the terrible truth of its evil, but sees it so intensely that it becomes an element of the beauty which is created by his act of perception—in the phrase by which Keats describes his own experience as merely a reader of *King Lear*, he "burns through" the evil.'[14] Crane's quest shows a similar desire to create beauty but also reveals a fear of over-reaching. Tracking quest and how it functions in verbal terms is a major concern of this present thesis. Indeed, the

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[12] Harold Bloom, The Ringers in the Tower (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1971) 21.

[13] William Carlos Williams, Paterson, ed. Christopher Macgowan (New York: New Direction, 1992) 78. Hereafter Williams, P.

[14] Lionel Trilling, The Opposing Self: Nine Essays in Criticism (London: Secker, 1955) 36.

poems mimic the testing journeys through the creative processes of the imagination and bear out Harold Bloom's definition of quest-poetry: 'The hero of internalised quest is the poet himself, the antagonists of quest are everything in the self that blocks imaginative work, and the fulfilment is never the poem itself, but the poem beyond that is made possible by the apocalypse of imagination.'[15] Similarly, Richard Sugg, describing The Bridge, names the imagination as 'the hero of this "epic of the modern consciousness."'[16] He rightly compares Crane to Stevens in this sense, as for both of them:

> a poem is not about external reality, but about the imagination's attempts to assimilate and unify external reality in its own life. Thus a poem is a record of the imagination's life, and a narrative poem like The Bridge is a record of one man's growth toward unity through history and place, when history and place are considered not only ultimately inseparable from but also originating in his own varying states of consciousness.[17]

Frye also discusses 'quest-romance' in a way that anticipates Bloom's assertion that English Romanticism is 'an internalization of romance': 'Translated into dream terms, the quest-romance is the search of the libido or desiring self for a fulfilment that will deliver it from the anxieties of reality but will still contain that reality.'[18] Although Bloom and Frye are discussing Romanticism, the problems of defining Romanticism also apply to Crane.

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[15] Bloom, Ringers 19.

[16] Richard P. Sugg, Hart Crane's 'The Bridge': A Description of Its Life (Alabama: U of Alabama P, 1976) 3.

[17] Sugg 5.

[18] Bloom, Ringers 18.

There have been challenges to Bloom's understanding. Joshua Wilner contends that Bloom's definition of quest-poetry relies upon 'the notion of internalisation' being 'a known quantity.' Wilner argues 'that the notion itself remains obscure and thus that the *problem* of internalisation and the *problem* of Romanticism may indeed, with respect to the discourse of literary history, be closely intertwined.'[19] Certainly a distrust of 'internalization' may explain the antipathy of many of Crane's critics such as Allen Tate who was one of the first critics to condemn The Bridge as a work of late Romanticism.[20]

One advantage of Bloom's definition is it accords with poetry's 'driven' nature. John Hollander, in his introduction to Poetics of Influence, quotes Bloom's concept of the poem, which is helpful here: 'But the poem—unlike the mind in creation—is a made thing, and as such is an achieved anxiety.'[21] This achieved anxiety is evidenced in the drama of tension and release that Crane's poetic quests describe and enact. That said, not all critics read Crane's poetic quests as texts of anxiety. Though Thomas Parkinson also notes Crane's constant searching, his summing up is more optimistic:

> Crane is capable of grossness and banality and sentimentality that Winters would never permit himself. He is often obscure on principle because he persistently violates the limits of language. What saves him is precisely what Winters lacks, the lift and

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[19] Joshua Wilner, Feeding on Infinity: Readings in the Romantic Rhetoric of Internalization (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2000) 5.

[20] Allen Tate, Reactionary Essays on Poetry and Ideas (New York: Scribner's, 1936) 41. Many other critics have remarked upon Crane's Romanticism including Yvor Winters, R.D. Blackmur, Harold Bloom, and Allen Ginsberg.

[21] John Hollander, introduction, Poetics of Influence, by Harold Bloom, ed. John Hollander (New Haven: Schwab, 1988) xviii.

> excitement of movement from poem to poem, the sense that something has been promised but not realized, that the realization is potentially there and may come to pass at any moment, so that all will become harmonious and clear.[22]

While the poems give the effect of promising this possibility, the 'lift and excitement' is transient. 'The Broken Tower,' Crane's last poem, a retrospective examination by Crane of his poetry, contains a line which sums up the pattern of the long poems: 'But not for long to hold each desperate choice.'

Crane's poems demonstrate a desire to enhance the world but also show the way in which belief, no longer the unique preserve of organized faith, is still necessary for the imagination to flourish. Writing to Waldo Frank, the poet acknowledges that 'The romantic attitude must at least have the background of an age of faith, whether approved or disproved no matter.'[23] In 'Modern Poetry' Crane further declares: 'That the modern poet can profitably assume the roles of philosopher or theologian is questionable at best. Science, the uncanonized Deity of the times, seems to have automatically displaced the hierarchies of both academy and Church.'[24] Describing this dilemma, R. W. B. Lewis writes that the attempt to deal with the religious issue imaginatively and honestly was the severest and sometimes the most discouraging challenge the modern artist had to face:

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[22] Thomas Parkinson, ed., Hart Crane and Yvor Winters: Their Literary Correspondence (Berkeley: U of California P, 1978) xxi.

[23] LHC 260.

[24] CPSL 263.

> Like Stevens, Crane believed that poetry was redemptive of human life, that it was the major modern source of revelation; but unlike Stevens, Crane felt that poetry was not an absolute replacement of a belief in God, but rather a visionary force capable of creating, of bringing into view, new objects of religious belief.[25]

As well as summing up the Modernist dilemma, Lewis captures Crane's fascination with man's need to worship. Thomas A. Vogler also detects this need for a faith of some kind: 'The central emotional element in Crane's Bridge, as it was in Blake, Wordsworth, and Keats, is the hope that motivated the uncertain pilgrim in his quest for a vision to be the basis of a faith.'[26]

Crane's awareness of the difficulties faced by his generation because of lack of faith (not specifically religious faith) is expressed in a letter: 'It is a terrific problem that faces the poet today—a world that is so in transition from a decayed culture towards a reorganization of human evaluations that there are few common terms, general denominators of speech that are solid enough or that ring with any vibration or spiritual conviction.'[27] By articulating these difficulties within the world, Crane, in effect, is also prescribing his proposed solution, which he will bring to the world. The 'it' that Crane describes in the following quotation is the necessary state of mind that allows that solution: 'It is a consciousness of something more vital than stylistic questions and "taste," it is vision, and a vision alone that not only America needs, but the whole

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[25] R. W. B. Lewis, The Poetry of Hart Crane: A Critical Study (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1967) 282-3.

[26] Thomas A. Vogler, Preludes to Vision: The Epic Venture in Blake, Wordsworth, Keats, and Hart Crane (Berkeley: U of California P, 1971) 145.

[27] CPSL 218.

world.'[28] Tilottama Rajan's remark about Shelley's lines 'As the human heart, / Gazing in dreams over the gloomy grave, / Sees its own treacherous likeness there' sums up Crane's fears for his vision[29]: 'Because the internalisation of vision does not mark a belief in the self as a source of value, so much as a doubt as to the reality of the ideal, Poet and narrator constantly mistake inner vision (or imagination) for external vision (or perception).'[30] Crane, as the poetic protagonist, cannot redeem himself without inspiration; his own poetic redemption underwrites the task he assigns himself.

Robert Combs writes of the poet's role as 'heroic redeemer', and the dangers involved in such a description:

> The poet is seen as a kind of priest who, while he opposes the Philistines, offers to the believer through the poem a higher, deeper, or truer experience of life than the believer could achieve for himself without the poet-priest's assistance. Common to both poet and priest is a belief that some special Truth, a Word waiting to be embodied symbolically, which will protect the reader from the lies of this world and make accessible to him the reality of a beyond. Poetry which is assumed to proceed along these lines is usually called 'visionary.'[31]

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[28] LHC 127.

[29] Percy Bysshe Shelley, Shelley: Poetical Works, ed. Thomas Hutchinson (London: Oxford UP, 1970) ll. 472-74. Hereafter Shelley, PW.

[30] Tilottama Rajan, 'Idealism and Scepticism in Shelley's Poetry [*The Triumph of Life* and *Alastor*]' in Shelley, ed. Michael O' Neill (London: Longman, 1993) 258.

[31] Robert Combs, Vision of the Voyage: Hart Crane and the Psychology of Romanticism (Memphis, TN: Memphis State UP, 1978) ix-x.

However, quite rightly, Combs goes on to qualify this statement: 'I do not believe that Crane's poems represent an attempt to reassert the religious consciousness in an unreligious age. Their honesty and skepticism continually see through the efforts of the mind to redeem the world.'[32] Instead Combs reads Crane's meaning as 'a temporary product of an always creative–destructive mind.'[33]

Combs' definition allows for the momentary resolutions within the poems but Elizabeth Jennings, who defines 'mysticism' as 'the study of direct union with God, a union which reaches beyond the senses and beyond reason,' would disagree.[34] Proposing that 'visionaries' are 'a synonym for "mystics,"' Jennings argues that 'in the case of poets like Rilke, Hart Crane and Wallace Stevens, men who were not Christians but whose work seems to me to be moving towards some vision' have 'much in common' with 'more orthodox visionaries.'[35] Both critics, despite their differences, acknowledge the presence of a form of faith; Combs believes that 'Crane celebrates the possibility of meaning, faith, and work in individual circumstances,'[36] and Jennings argues that Crane is 'a poet who made poetry not simply a channel for mystical experience but the means to attain it.'[37] Jennings implies that poetry serves God, while Combs is concerned with the autonomy of the individual who remakes faith from within the imagination. Sugg sums it up more accurately when he observes that the poet 'moves toward the Bridge, the imagination's "steeled cognisance," by experiencing and assimilating

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[32] Combs x.

[33] Combs x.

[34] Elizabeth Jennings, Every Changing Shape (1961; Manchester: Carcanet, 1996) 14.

[35] Jennings 17.

[36] Combs x.

[37] Jennings 223.

earlier definitions.'[38] Roy Harvey Pearce understands the history of American poetry as the history of an impulse towards antinomianism, 'an antinomianism which in the nineteenth century and after seemed to be the last refuge of man in a world he was by then willing, or daring, to admit he himself had made and was therefore obliged to make over.'[39] Crane himself understands the relationship between America and American poets as one of potential:

> I am concerned with the future of America, but not because I think that America has any so-called par value as a state or as a group of people... It is only because I feel persuaded that here are destined to be discovered certain as yet undefined spiritual quantities, perhaps a new hierarchy of faith not to be developed so completely elsewhere. And in this process I like to feel myself as a potential factor; certainly I must speak in its terms and what discoveries I may make are situated in its experience.[40]

Antinomianism is the view that Christians are released from the obligation of observing the moral law; Pearce relates it to Romanticism: 'The antinomian drive to accept only one's own testimony as to the worth and authority of the powers-that-be became the "Romantic" drive to testify that one can really know only one's own power, and yet that an element of such knowledge is the realization that all other men have this power too.' Again, we see reason for

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[38] Sugg 16.

[39] Roy Harvey Pearce, The Continuity of American Poetry (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1961) 41.

[40] CPSL 219.

anxiety. The poet feels the responsibility of using his 'power' to assist others to realize their authority through his poems.

Crane does not attempt to suggest a substitute for religion but instead concentrates upon the psychological need to worship as he searches out what Lewis terms, 'The divine *within* that world.'[41] Bloom helpfully asks (in relation to Romantic poetry): 'What, for men without belief and even without credulity, is the spiritual form of romance?'[42] The search demands a willing and receptive state of mind. In his essay 'Freud: Within and Beyond Culture,' Trilling, discussing Coleridge's phrase, 'the willing suspension of disbelief' argues that this 'suspension' is a form of 'moral faith': 'And certainly the willing suspension of disbelief constitutes moral faith—the essence of the moral life would seem to consist in doing that most difficult thing in the world, making a willing suspension of disbelief in the selfhood of someone else.'[43] What Trilling is really suggesting is that the 'willing suspension' is the act of faith. The hope and despair within Crane's poems demonstrates both an understanding of this and a resistance to it. M. H. Abrams succinctly sums up this Romantic dichotomy:

> Much of what distinguishes writers I call 'Romantic' derives from the fact that they undertook, whatever their religious creed or lack of creed, to save traditional concepts, schemes and values which had been based on the relation of the creator to his creature and creation, but to reformulate them within the prevailing two-term system of subject and object, ego and non-

[41] Lewis 282.

[42] Bloom, PI 23.

[43] Lionel Trilling, Beyond Culture: Essays on Literature and Learning (London: Secker, 1966) 94.

> ego, the human mind or consciousness and its transactions with nature.[44]

In these poems, 'the divine within that world' is made visible through the symbols to which Crane attaches meaning, but paradoxically, these symbols emphasize the need for faith. Crane's attitude to 'the imaged Word' (V-6, line 29) is religious and visionary in tone, validating Jennings's statement that much of Crane's language is from 'a religious, even a ritualistic or liturgical source.'[45]

In effect, Crane makes a religion of his poetry to separate himself from the chaos and aimlessness of his world, typified by the poetry of T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound. Albert Gelpi describes their poems as a form of reporting: 'To baffled readers of The Waste Land and The Cantos, Eliot and Pound spoke for their generation in voicing not coherence but confusion. Maybe never before had expression seemed so inchoate, so flauntingly exploitive of its need for coherence.'[46] Aware of, but rejecting, Eliot's pessimism, Crane states:

> There is no one writing in English who can command so much respect, to my mind, as Eliot. However, I take Eliot as a point of departure towards an almost complete reverse of direction. His pessimism is amply justified, in his own case. But I would apply as much of his erudition and technique as I can absorb and

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[44] M. H. Abrams, Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature (New York: Norton, 1971) 13.

[45] Jennings 227.

[46] Albert Gelpi, A Coherent Splendor: The American Poetic Renaissance, 1910-1050 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987) 7.

> assemble towards a more positive, or (if [I] must put it so in a sceptical age) ecstatic goal.[47]

Crane's acknowledgement of Eliot is visible throughout the work, in phrases and mannerisms both echoed and contested.

Crane's symbols, like Eliot's, are often mythological and have religious significance; in effect, they are imbued with power, of which the poet is aware:

> The great mythologies of the past (including the Church) are deprived of enough façade to even launch a good raillery against. Yet much of their traditions are operative still—in millions of chance combinations of related and unrelated detail, psychological reference, figures of speech, precepts, etc. These are all a part of our common experience and the terms, at least partially, of that very experience when it defines or extends itself.[48]

The Waste Land relies heavily upon the power of such symbols. Jessie Weston, in From Ritual to Romance,[49] deciphers the mystery of the Grail stories and claims that the practice of ritual has ceded to the literary form of legend. That it survives is proof of myth's adaptability, evidenced by Allan Tate's remark in the introduction to White Buildings where he declares: 'A living art is new; it is old.'[50] This remark is echoed In Modern American

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[47] LHC 114-5.

[48] CPSL 218.

[49] Jessie L. Weston, From Ritual to Romance: An Account of the Holy Grail from Ancient Ritual to Christian Symbol (1920; New York: Anchor-Doubleday, 1957) 4.

[50] Allen Tate, introduction, White Buildings by Hart Crane (1926; New York: Liveright, 1972) xv.

Criticism, where Walter Sutton discusses Jung's theory that poetry appeals because it is recognized by the reader's 'collective unconscious.'[51] In 'For The Marriage of Faustus and Helen', the reader does not have to believe that Crane personally experiences the past, but if he 'suspends disbelief' he becomes part of the experience:

> We know, eternal gunman, our flesh remembers
> The tensile boughs, the nimble blue plateaus,
> The mounted, yielding cities of the air. (FMFH, 3, 19-21)

These lines echo Jung's theory that poetry appeals to a 'collective unconscious.' Sutton also quotes Maud Bodkin who believes that these sorts of archetypes 'might be able to fulfill the functions of "the images and dogma of institutional religion" in an earlier age.'[52] Such archetypes or poetic symbols replace or recall the faith of an earlier time. Crane's use of the quest ideal to invoke inspiration might be seen as such a symbol. Within this theory, the rebirth archetype is the most important because it involves participation in 'the tidal ebb towards death followed by life renewal' that allows 'a means of increased awareness, and of fuller expression and control, of our own lives in their secret and momentous obedience to universal rhythms.'[53] Crane's poems emulate this 'tidal ebb' as he looks for the secrets of creativity.

Bloom also recognizes the importance of myth. In Shelley's Mythmaking, he quotes the Frankfurts' view[54]: 'Myth is a form of poetry which

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[51] Walter Sutton, Chapter 7, 'Psychological and Myth Criticism,' Modern American Criticism (New Jersey: Prentice, 1963).

[52] Sutton 177.

[53] Sutton 177.

[54] Henri and Mrs. H. A. Frankfurt.

transcends poetry in that it proclaims a truth; a form of reasoning which transcends reasoning in that it wants to bring about the truth it proclaims; a form of action, of ritual behaviour, which does not find its fulfilment in the act but must proclaim and elaborate a poetic form of truth.'[55] While Bloom makes clear that he does not agree that proclaiming a truth is to transcend poetry, myth criticism seems to understand poetry as a transcending medium. Julia Krisreva, in 'Gérard de Nerval, The Disinherited Poet,' also notes the connection between myth and the search for 'truth': 'The untiring quest for mistresses or, on the religious level, the accumulation of feminine divinities or mother goddesses that Eastern and particularly Egyptian religions lavish on the 'subject,' points to the elusive nature of that *Thing*—necessarily lost so that this 'subject,' separated from the 'object,' might become a speaking being.'[56] Although Crane relies on mythical symbolism for the nuances of meaning that are associated with these myths, the poet always anchors these symbols within the world of 'contemporary reality.'[57] Despite Crane's explanation, the difficulties associated with allusion generally, might also account for some of the 'difficulty' readers cite, in relation to the poetry. While John Hollander states that allusion is 'inherently poetic, rather than expository,' and argues that it is irrelevant whether the allusions are deliberate because 'the same shaping spirit that gives form to tropes of thought and feeling' can make new metaphors rather than simply proving the learnedness of the poet.[58] Sanford Pinsker, reviewing The Anatomy Lesson by Philip Roth[59], writes of America in the twentieth century:

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[55] Harold Bloom, Shelley's Mythmaking (1959; New York: Cornell UP, 1969) 3.

[56] Maud Ellmann, ed., Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism (London: Longman, 1994) 201.

[57] LHC 260.

[58] John Hollander, The Figure of Echo: A Mode of Allusion in Milton and After (Berkeley: U of California P, 1981) ix.

> One of the first casualties was literary allusion, that device formerly linking readers to books, and books to one another. Writers could no longer assume, as earlier authors had been able to take for granted, that their audience knew Homer, knew the Bible, knew Shakespeare. References might be made to historical or contemporary celebrities of course, but American readers obviously wanted something other than intellectual allusions and Jamesian reflection. (881-882)[60]

Although Pinsker is describing America in the latter half of the century, his statement reflects changes in both Crane's time and our own. While Crane's poems are sometimes dense with literary allusion, he also employs contemporary references to anchor the poems in the familiarity of the present.[61]

This can also be detected in modern recognition of the psyche as an influence on the poetry. James Frazer suggests a link between myths and rituals; his study of myths had a huge impact on early twentieth-century thought.[62] Frazer argues that both magic and science involve a belief that nature responds automatically to human action. Each includes a set of beliefs about the natural world and a set of practices for making nature conform to human desires. Religion, which Frazer suggests was developed out of

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[59] Philip Roth, The Anatomy Lesson (New York: Farrar, 1983).

[60] Sanford Pinsker, 'Imagination on the Ropes,' rev. of The Anatomy Lesson, by Philip Roth, Georgia Review 37 (1983): 880-888.

[61] Crane's poems describe contemporary places and buildings, modern life and name popular songs.

[62] James Frazer, The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion (London: Macmillan, 1963) 48-60.

frustration with magic, differs from both magic and science because it encompasses unpredictable spiritual entities outside of the natural world and the means to attempt to influence them. Crane's poems imply that the poet views his symbols as magical archetypes which will reward the poet if he acts appropriately but the emotional descents within the poems suggest that the poet understands his own actions as religious, in Frazer's sense, as he struggles to discover the 'appropriate' response that will make the world more predictable.

The poet's desire to 'know' his symbols is worked out through describing his own and others' experience. As Sutton reminds us, 'literature, like all art, is concerned with the evocation and evaluation of experience.'[63] Pinsker argues that the modern need for experience is one of greed: 'Greedy for experience ourselves, we came to expect *experience* from our writers—experience fashioned from whole, American cloth and proudly sporting its union label. "I am the man, I suffer'd, I was there." These are the stations of the cross that the Whitmanian persona would have us reenact.'[64] Crane explores the concept of experience via the Romantic myth of describing his plight in the world and the poet's response to it: 'It has always been taken for granted, however, that his intuitions were salutary and that his vision either sowed or epitomized "experience" (in the Blakeian sense).'[65]

To extend that range of experience, Crane adopts and adapts the experiences of those on the periphery of the modern world for, as Combs asserts, 'The Romantic lyric has always depended in large part on the poet's willingness to suspend categorical notions of who he is in order to experience

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[63] Sutton 211.

[64] Pinsker 882.

[65] LHC 260.

phenomenal reality in terms other than those defined and policed by his culture.'[66] R.W.B. Lewis observes thus:

> Each version of the central experience, as we have had so many occasions to say, is a synecdoche; each stands for all the others, and taken together they accumulate into that same central experience the poem as a whole is enacting.[67]

All of the long poems deal with the way that inspiration works as a catalyst to produce the response that evokes a visionary ideal. Before looking at what Crane means by inspiration, it is necessary to understand that the meaning of inspiration tends to be assumed rather than defined. Timothy Clark, in The Theory of Inspiration, talks of the persistent myth of inspiration in relation to the Platonic and the Biblical traditions in which the poet is a mouthpiece for a divine figure.[68] This assumed meaning is the result of inspiration's historical connection with the muse: 'the concept was so persuasive that even today an individual might refer in figurative language to a personal muse as a source of his or her inspiration.'[69] The Romantic age developed a change in attitude as 'Romanticism exalted creativity as the object of a new mythology.'[70] Rather than understanding inspiration as the gift of some external agency, it became an inner force. Crane's statements about insistent creativity are ironic as well as contradictory. At one point he

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[66] Combs 60.

[67] Lewis 380.

[68] Timothy Clark, The Theory of Inspiration: Composition as a Crisis of Subjectivity in Romantic and Post-Romantic Writing (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1997) 2.

[69] 'Muses,' Women of Classical Mythology: A Biographical Dictionary, 1991 ed. 312-314.

[70] Clark 5.

writes: 'There are days when I simply have to "sit on myself" at my desk to shut out rhythms and melodies that belong to the poem and have never been written because I have succeeded only too well during the course of the day's work in excluding and stifling such a train of thoughts. And then there are periods again when the whole world couldn't shut out the plans and beauties of that work—and I get a little of it on paper.'[71] At another time, he states, 'And I am as completely out of sympathy with the familiar whimpering caricature of the artist and his "divine rights" as you seem to be.'[72] Despite these ambiguities, Crane is always aware of the importance of technique: 'My work is becoming known for its formal perfection and hard glowing polish, but most of these qualities, I'm afraid, are due to a great deal of labor and patience on my part.'[73] Yet rewriting is part of the experience of the progress of the poem in quest-form for, as Bloom asserts 'rewriting is an invariable trope for voicing, within a poem, and that voicing and re-seeing are much the same process, a process reliant upon un-naming, which rhetorically means the undoing of a prior metonymy.'[74]

Referring to the traditional assumption of what inspiration is, Clark describes it as usually directing 'the reader to a privileged relation between the writer's act of composition and some transcendent principle such as the muse, Apollo, genius or the Romantic imagination.'[75] In Crane's poems authorial intent controls the use of an inspirational symbol. Instead of the writer being at the mercy of the muse's bidding, the poet seeks her out. Pursuit of inspiration deliberately shapes and themes the poems because the

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[71] LHC 191.

[72] CPSL 243-4.

[73] LHC 192.

[74] Harold Bloom, Agon: Towards a Theory of Revisionism (New York:Oxford UP, 1982) 82.

[75] Clark 1.

poems are about a process revealing, as Coleridge has it, 'the power of acting creatively under laws of its own origination.'[76] Crane's use of the Muse allows him access to the many characteristics associated with the trope but the poet's muse is very much a tool: 'I realize that I am utilizing the gifts of the past as instruments principally.'[77] In all of the long poems, Crane provokes the reaction through the traditional method of invoking the muse by describing and addressing her but he also petitions other subjects. Invocation can take different forms but it is always a petition for imagination and illumination. Crane's invocations in 'Voyages II' are a direct plea for one moment of imaginative transformation:

> Bind us in time, O Seasons clear, and awe.
> O minstrel galleons of Carib fire,
> Bequeath us to no earthly shore until
> Is answered in the vortex of our grave
> The seal's wide spindrift gaze toward paradise. (V-2, 21-25)

Crane adapts the traditional invocation for his own purpose. Milton uses this form of address in the opening section of Paradise Lost; the poet intimates that his muse is the Holy Spirit: 'Sing, Heav'nly Muse, that on the secret top / Of Oreb, or of Sinai, didst inspire.'[78] Milton's purpose is aggrandized to 'assert Eternal Providence, / And justify the ways of God to men,' and to pursue 'Things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme.' Rather than justifying the

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[76] CPSL 260.

[77] 'General Aims and Theories,' CPSL 222.

[78] John Milton, Milton: Poetical Works, ed. Douglas Bush (New York: Oxford UP, 1969). Hereafter Milton, PW.

'ways of God to men,' Crane attempts to justify the ways of poetry to man through his belief that poetry might enhance our perception of the world.

In Bloom's words, the Romantic quest 'must make all things new, and then marry what it has made. Less urgently, it seeks to define itself through the analogue of each man's creative potential.'[79] The Romantic quest is not for an external solution but a new definition of self. According to M. D. Uroff, the poems 'detail the search in the interior world of the poet's psyche'[80]; memory of an experience (an actual experience or an imagined experience) plays an important part in the concept of 'inspiration.' T. S. Eliot, in 'The Metaphysical Poets' in Selected Essays understands this as the poet's ability: 'When a poet's mind is perfectly equipped for its work, it is constantly amalgamating disparate experience.'[81] Robert Graves claims 'it is not too much to say that all original discoveries and inventions and musical and poetical compositions are the result of proleptic thought—the anticipation, by means of a suspension of time, of a result that could not have been arrived at by inductive reasoning—and of what may be called analeptic thought, the recovery of lost events by the same suspension.'[82] The irony of Crane's theme is that he specifically creates the muse whom he chases: Graves' proleptic thought that anticipates by means of a suspension in time. The task of 'inspiring' is assigned by the poet, it is as much a creation of the poet's imagination as any part of the poems. Graves understands the suspension of time in poems through a sense of time's equivocal nature and states that this

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[79] Bloom, PI 42.

[80] M.D. Uroff, Hart Crane: The Patterns of His Poetry (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1974) 61.

[81] T. S. Eliot, Selected Essays: 1917-1932 (London: Methuen, 1932) 287.

[82] Robert Graves, The White Goddess: A Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth (London: Faber, 1961) 343.

is the reason that interest is concentrated in the present.[83] The verb tense in Crane's poems is often the present one, implying that the poem is 'happening,' regardless of whether the time is present or past.

The connecting thread through the long poems is that the human condition is out of balance. Crane's need for a female 'other' to balance his masculine poetic ability is an acknowledgement that male and female elements are necessary for creation, and that physical and spiritual equanimity can only be restored by a symbiotic equilibrium. Solution is proposed through female symbols which inspire the poet; the Muse in 'Voyages,' Helen in 'For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen,' and Brooklyn Bridge in The Bridge and more generally, Nature, the land and the sea.

Crane's use of a female muse parallels the poet's pursuit of his lover. Frye, in his essay 'The Survival of Eros in Poetry,' comments upon this type of device: 'In these sublimated forms the love of a mistress forms a parallel quest to the purgatorial one: it is what inspires a hero to great deeds and a poet to great words.'[84] Throughout White Buildings, Crane struggles to resolve the conflicts between carnal desire and spiritual need. As Ernest Smith claims: 'the desire for spiritual unification is held in a continual tension with the forces of sexual urge.'[85] Smith correctly assesses this tension yet the interpretation does not account for the way in which the poems move beyond sexual desire, in the manner of Crane's letter about Emil Opffer: 'In the deepest sense, where flesh became transformed through intensity of response to counter-response, where sex was beaten out, where a purity of

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[83] Graves 344.

[84] Northrop Frye, Myth and Metaphor: Selected Essays 1974 – 1988, ed. Robert D. Denham (Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1990) 47.

[85] Ernest J. Smith, The Imaged Word: The Infrastructure of Hart Crane's 'White Buildings' (New York: Lang, 1990) 7.

joy was reached that included tears.'[86] The tension within the poems allegorizes the conflict between the mind and body, but the body's triumph is part of the search for faith.

Lewis, also alert to the seemingly female nature of the muse, believes that her implied gender might be a ploy similar to the 'Albertine strategy,' an authorial strategy for projecting homosexual impulses as heterosexual.[87] 'Voyages' biographically alludes to a homosexual affair with Emil Opffer; imaginatively, however, it overrides gender divisions, even as the poet pursues a figure, who, through association with the traditional symbol of the sea, would seem to be female. In 'Voyages II,' the poet talks about the sea, using the possessive adjective 'her'; 'her demeanors' and 'her turning shoulders' while 'Her undinal vast belly moonward bends.' Herbert Leibowitz comments on the way that the Muse's femininity is emphasized by the poet's descriptions of her limbs, breasts, shoulders, belly and hair but also notes that she is his creation: 'her body, as it were, is sculpted by the poet.'[88] In the last stanza of this section, the pronouns change to include the poet, in preparation for the fusion that occurs in the next poem, 'Bequeath us to no earthly shore until / Is answered in the vortex of our grave.' From this point, Crane addresses the lover as 'you.' In 'The Harbor Dawn,' the glosses demand '*Who is the woman with us in the dawn*?...'; the 'us' contradicts the assumed genders of the lovers. Like the images of muse and sea intermingling, the differences seem irrelevant in the overall design of the poems. Crane does write poems which can be read as heterosexual love poems although often

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[86] LHC 181.

[87] Lewis 33.

[88] Herbert A. Leibowitz, Hart Crane: An Introduction to the Poetry (New York: Columbia UP, 1968) 92-93.

this is because of the poet's use of female symbols rather than a direct address to a female lover.

In general, critics have vehemently stressed that Crane's poems should be read without reference to gender. Samuel Hazo's use of 'perversion' is telling: 'There is nothing in the poems that explicitly betrays a perversion of the impulses of love, and there is no thematic reason that would lead a reader to relate the love imagery, where it does exist, to a source homosexual in nature.'[89] Even Lewis, in general sympathetic to Crane, feels obliged to both mention and then dismiss sexual preference: 'Male homosexual love is no doubt included somewhere in the pattern, but I do not believe it should be insisted upon.'[90] Mark Lilly thinks that this answer is 'the one scholars have been employing for decades—to say that the gender of the loved one is of no consequence, that the work has a universal meaning and appeal, by which is always meant a heterosexual meaning and appeal.'[91] Lilly also notes that many critics pair Crane's homosexuality with his drinking:

> A favourite abuse strategy is derogatory juxtaposition. Almost every study of Hart Crane speaks of his alcoholism and his sexuality in the same breath: he was an alcoholic and a homosexual' (A. Alvarez); 'Even towards the end, he never completely gave up the struggle against his two weaknesses, alcohol and homosexuality' (Susan Jenkins Brown); 'as his drinking became more furious, so did his homosexual liaisons,

[89] Samuel Hazo, Smithereened Apart: A Critique of Hart Crane (Athens, OH: Ohio UP, 1963) 56.

[90] Lewis 339.

[91] Mark Lilly, Gay Men's Literature in the Twentieth Century (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993) 9.

> chiefly with sailors, became more squalid, more dangerous, and more hopeless' (R.W. Butterfield); 'uneducated, alcoholic, homosexual, paranoic, suicidal' (L.S. Dembo); 'Sexual aberration and drunkenness were the pitfalls in which his spirit wrestled with a kind of desperation' (W. Fowlie).[92]

Lilly's list continues. Like the notion of 'internalization' discussed earlier, critical dissent might have its roots in antipathy; here, in cultural attitudes which make homosexuality problematic. While Lilly argues that this is overt censorship, Thomas Yingling believes that reading a text by a homosexual writer requires an 'understanding of how homosexuality is articulated once the homosexual is indeed separated off as the object of the homosexual continuum—once he "appears" in culture and once he begins to understand himself as being of a certain (stigmatised) social order.'[93] Crane, writing in the nineteen-twenties, does not directly tackle the problem but neither does he circumvent it. Rather than the gender of the lovers, it is the opposition of female symbol and male protagonist which defines and ultimately creates the poems.

By uniting male protagonist and female symbol, Crane is creating a metaphor for writing poetry. This is not unique to Crane, traditionally, heterosexual poets have incorporated the idea of a muse into poetry. Wallace Stevens believed that 'all poets address themselves to someone and it is of the essence of that instinct, and it seems to amount to an instinct, that it should be to an elite, not to a drab but to a woman with the hair of a

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[92] Lilly 9.

[93] Thomas E. Yingling, Hart Crane and the Homosexual Text: New Thresholds, New Anatomies (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1990) 2.

pythoness'[94] However, in Articulate Flesh, Woods postulates the theory that poems can be understood as the only possible children of homosexual union. He argues that this is why the Muses traditionally had to be female; implicit in this is that authors are male: 'The metaphor of sexual creativity having been taken in a near to literal sense, the relationship between Muse and artist had to be heterosexual, in order to be reproductive.'[95] Some writers feel that the muse is a mother figure rather than a sexual 'other'; Thom Gunn, in a 1977 interview, reiterates Graves' words that 'Poetry began in the matriarchal age, and derives its powers from the moon, not the sun'[96]: 'I used to believe that my muse was male; but I've come to realise that Graves is right, that the muse has to be female. The Goddess is a mother, not a wife or a lover. The feminine principle is the source and I think it dominates in male artists whether homo- or heterosexual.'[97]

This matriarchal role emphasizes creative rather than sexual power; in 'Voyages II,' 'Her undinal vast belly moonwards bends' symbolizes the fecundity and regenerative powers of Crane's symbolic use of the sea as a muse figure. The implied gender of the Muse-lover also serves to highlight the division between Crane and his goal. 'Otherness' ensures that the poet remains in a state of longing for his unachievable objective, for, as Graves writes: 'A poet cannot continue to be a poet if he feels that he has made a permanent conquest of the Muse, that she is always his for the asking.'[98]

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[94] Wallace Stevens, The Necessary Angel: Essays on Reality and Imagination (New York: Knopf, 1951) 29.

[95] Gregory Woods, Articulate Flesh: Male Homo-Eroticism and Modern Poetry (New Haven: Yale UP, 1987) 117.

[96] Graves 448.

[97] Woods 118.

[98] Graves 444.

In Crane's poems, the muse ultimately represents the 'Word.' The yearning for the 'imaged Word' (V-6, line 29) is transferred into the poems as a desire to capture the muse. In 'Voyages,' the lover battles through the poems in search of the implicitly female 'Creation's blithe and petalled word.' Helen, in 'For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen,' is the signpost to the realization that 'The imagination spans beyond despair / Outpacing bargain, vocable and prayer.' The female Bridge is a symbol of the 'Word's' 'glittering pledge.' Graves claims 'the real perpetually obsessed Muse-poet distinguishes between the Goddess as manifest in the supreme power, glory, wisdom and love of woman, and the individual woman whom the Goddess may make her instrument for a month, a year, seven years or even more.'[99] In Crane's poems, the Goddess is poetry, and he serves and remains faithful to her throughout.

Wilner, too, admits to the role division between male and female but reads this as a threat to the writer for if 'the figure of the lyric poet was emphatically marked out as a male, the male lyric poet's involvement with language was haunted by a correspondingly drastic threat of feminization.'[100] Wilner is perhaps influenced by the dangers the muse represents as in 'Voyages,' where the lover is at the mercy of the female sea. Leibowitz reads Crane's symbols in opposition to the male poet: 'If the feminine face of the sea is described in a vocabulary of romantic wonder and smoothness, its darker masculine face is expressed in a vocabulary of austere nobility and graphic wit.'[101] For this critic, the imagination is: 'active, masculine, constructive, like a cutting tool; it distils poetic competence. It uses its power not to prey on the

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[99] Graves 490.

[100] Wilner 61.

[101] Leibowitz 95.

world but to cut away whatever veils perception. The imagination escapes the solipsistic trap, travelling outside itself and coupling, so to speak, with the world, "another's will."'[102]

Leibowitz implies that this 'other' must be feminine by emphasizing the poet's masculine actions but his assertion that coming together prevents the poet from falling into 'the solipsistic trap' suggests that this is the natural fate of the 'masculine' imagination. Bloom also claims that the danger of solipsism lies within isolation although he assigns such danger to the Romantic creed rather than the museless poet: 'The Romantic movement is from nature to the imagination's freedom (sometimes a reluctant freedom), and the imagination's freedom is frequently purgatorial, redemptive in direction but destructive of the social self.'[103] Crane, far from avoiding inwardness, attempts to possess it; as a Romantic poet he seeks its redemptive qualities.

To some extent, Crane seems to have been perpetuating his own myth of the Romantic 'self' as the tortured poet, suffering for his art. Yet this myth, if myth it is, is one that his friends were ready to accept at Crane's valuation, evidenced by Cowley's description of Crane's methods:

> The process started when Hart chose, or was chosen by, the subject for a poem....His first step, after the subject imposed itself, was to make a collection of words and phrases that might be used in the poem...Once the right words had formed themselves into something like the proper pattern, there came a stage of revision that again might last for weeks or months. Hart was like the sorcerer of a primitive tribe; he was trying to

[102] Leibowitz 3-4.

[103] Bloom, Ringers 16.

> produce not poems only, but incantations or mantras that would have a magical power, evoking in the reader the same hallucinated visions that the poet had seen. Such incantations cannot exert their full effect unless every pause is calculated and every word is in its inevitable place; not a syllable can go to waste; everything has to be patiently tested, sharpened, enriched, and clarified.[104]

Cowley's words anticipate scenes from 'The Dance,' where the poet protagonist is burned at the stake in order to guarantee the fertility of the land. As this fertility is a symbol for the poet's imaginative processes, the metaphor suggests an element of autobiography, but other writers are also present. Their nuances enrich the effects of Crane's poetry. As Leigh Hunt writes, 'Imagination enriches everything....The moon is Homer's and Shakespeare's moon, as well as the one we look at.'[105]

Shelley's 'Alastor; or The Spirit of Solitude' might be one of Crane's sources for his bridge, but Crane's version of this 'spirit' is his own: 'Does the bright arch of rainbow clouds, / And pendant mountain seen in the calm lake, / Lead only to a black and watery depth.'[106] Shelley's 'bright arch' translates into Crane's 'myth to God' in 'Proem' while his 'black and watery depth' is translated into a glittering mirror that reflects Crane's bridge in lines 67-69 of 'Atlantis': 'O River-throated—iridescently upborne / Through the bright drench and fabric of our veins; / With white escarpments swinging into light.' Rajan,

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[104] Malcolm Cowley, A Second Flowering: Works and Days of the Lost Generation (New York: Viking, 1973) 207-8.

[105] 'On the Realities of Imagination,' Romantic Critical Essays, ed. David Bromwich (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987) 141.

[106] Shelley, PW. II. 213-15.

discussing 'Alastor; or The Spirit of Solitude,' argues that: 'For the Poet as for the narrator, the external source seems reassuring, while the internal source opens up a world of doubts and ambiguities.'[107] In effect, the 'shaping spirit' comforts and reassures the poet as he struggles with his inner world.

Bloom makes the point that 'what makes a poem strongest is *how* it excludes what is almost present in it, or nearest to presence in it'[108]:

> Poems are *to other poems* what people are *to themselves*. But poems are *not to themselves* what people are *to themselves*. When a person says: 'I and the Abyss,' he is saying: 'I and my unconscious.' But when a poem says: 'I and the Abyss,' it is saying: 'I and the other strong poems that impinge upon me.'[109]

Eliot's poems, especially The Waste Land, might be understood as these 'other strong poems.' The Bridge, which is often described as Crane's response to The Waste Land, betrays its reaction through Eliot-like nuances. Crane stresses 'I see literature as very closely related to life,—its essence, in fact.'[110] Yet his inspirational symbols, because they are female, are remote from the poet. For Crane, 'experience' is not the result of personal actions but a mixture of sensation and response to abstract concepts, which, Combs argues, places Crane within the Romantic tradition:

> The Romantics realized that beauty, goodness, inspiration, all 'spiritual' realities are objects...They are 'realities' in the same

[107] O' Neill 257

[108] Bloom, Agon 236-7.

[109] Bloom, Agon 237.

[110] Lewis 191.

> way physical objects are realities: they are mediated responses whose meanings are not immanent in the objects but dependent on the expectations and training of the perceiving individual. Consequently these objects are not fixed but may change their meanings for the individual depending on his needs and interests.[111]

Alvarez, describing Crane as 'intuitive', understands the poetry as the 'single intense moment of perception' and 'the poet's reactions to the object, rather than the object itself.'[112] Crane's poetry is reactive in this sense; as Alvarez continues: 'Crane doesn't "feel his thought"; he feels instead of thinking...His poems begin with a surrender to sensations; they end with a kind of digestion of the whole subject.'[113] This explains how Crane creates his poems but not how the poems work upon the imagination of the reader. Crane explains the process thus, 'It must rely (even to a large extent with myself) on its organic impact on the imagination to successfully imply its meaning.'[114] Sugg's explanation is similar but more elaborate:

> The act of imagination, which is the poem, becomes a bridge to a new state of consciousness, a unitive state to which the reader implicitly assents. The organic process which results in this act is one of assimilation and regeneration. The appeal of the poem is to the reader's own imagination, and its goal is the liberation

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[111] Combs 23-24.

[112] A. Alvarez, The Shaping Spirit: Studies in Modern English and American Poets (London: Chatto, 1967) 110.

[113] Alvarez 119.

[114] 'General Aims and Theories,' CPSL 222.

> of the reader from previous precepts and preconceptions into the mythic realm of the creative imagination, where he can perceive spiritual illuminations, shining with a morality essentialized from experience directly, and begin to move toward his own spiritual articulations.[115]

Although Crane's poetry seems to serve the muse in the hope of being rewarded by vision, Crane shows a resigned awareness of the temporality of his vision. 'Legende' openly acknowledges and mourns this loss:

> The sand and sea have had their way,
> And moons of spring and autumn,—
> All, save I.
> And even my vision will be erased
> As a cameo the waves claim again. (Lege, 7-11)[116]

As Combs writes of Crane: 'He accepted the awesome burden of examining his own experience, fully realizing that it would never be reconcilable with the value formations of his own culture.'[117] Combs believes that this is the reason that redemptionism acts as the support that the Romantic artist does not have in his culture.[118] Sugg argues that Crane redeems the possibilities of the future by living through and integrating the past and present: 'He redeems it by demonstrating through his own example that the human imagination has a life that can assimilate, unify and grow beyond any experience of time or

[115] Sugg 6-7.

[116] 'Poems Uncollected but Published by Crane,' CP.

[117] Combs 36.

[118] Combs 36.

place, that the human imagination is itself a bridge uniting past and present and leading to the future.'[119] Crane admits: 'After this perfection of death—nothing is possible in motion but a resurrection of some kind... All I know through very much suffering and dullness (somehow I seem to twinge more all the time) is that it interests me still to affirm certain things.'[120] 'Resurrection' acknowledges that death is the first step towards rebirth, evidenced by the downward drive of the poems that precedes the ascendant 'gaze toward paradise.' It explains the determined hope within the poems.

My key method will be close reading of these three long poems, in chronological order, with special attention to the points of quest, myth and faith raised in this chapter and the way in which the described journeys enact the poetic quest. Crane enacts this definition by constantly re-entering the past to rework its meaning; these retrospective journeys are the catalyst that releases the ability of the imagination to process words and ideas. This 'processing ability of the imagination' is released through associative use of language. Robert Creeley reminds us that 'an association between images need not be "logical"' in his helpful summary: 'Crane's use of language...will invariably be attached to an *emotion* which can and will sustain them in a total pattern of *meaning*. That line of *meaning* can be determined in all of his active poems, and that this line will depend, precisely, on the assumedly disconnected images some readers have balked at.'[121]

The role of the female muse will be explored within the setting of each poem in order to draw conclusions about Crane's purpose and authorial intentions. Particular attention will be paid to the notion that Crane is a

[119] Sugg 5.

[120] LHC 115.

[121] Robert Creeley, A Quick Graph: Collected Notes and Essays, ed. Donald Allen (San Francisco: Four Seasons, 1970) 83.

'difficult' poet, despite his mostly traditional use of metre and often, of rhyme. The thesis will examine Crane's use of compressed metaphors, and the pun, which Paul Giles asserts, 'is the structural principle behind The Bridge.[122] I will support my analysis by drawing on the poems in White Buildings, the later poems, and Crane's letters. Critical appraisal and poetic influence will be examined. Intertextuality between the Bridge poems will be traced and followed to counter criticism that The Bridge does not cohere, as well as intertextuality between the long poems, generally. While uncovering interpretative significance, the thesis will pay special attention to the interplay of hope and despair within the poems.

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In Chapter 1, Crane's first long poem, 'For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen' is examined. The chapter aims to bring out important strands which will appear in the other two long poems and its dependence upon 'Recitative.' The poet's obsession with 'spiritualizing the machine' is introduced through Crane's references to the spiritual poverty of the world. The poet's method of using the past as a example of possibility is also examined; Crane places the past in opposition to the present to highlight the positive attributes of one and the negative qualities of the other. The chapter also explores the way that Crane tries out identities. Here, Crane combines the two myths of Faustus and Helen who traditionally represent intellect and beauty. Crane writes in his letters that Faustus is 'the symbol of myself, the poetic or imaginative man of all times.'[123] The poet, as Faustus, represents man's thirst for knowledge, but the character remains undeveloped, unlike the protagonist of 'Voyages' and The Bridge. The implications of the effects of neglect upon the muse are also

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[122] Paul Giles, Hart Crane: The Contexts of 'The Bridge' (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986) 1.

[123] LHC 120.

examined. The muse symbol splits and merges; Helen is examined both as a mythical inspirational figure, cruelly used within her own contemporary world, and as a name, synonymous with beauty within our own time. The chapter will be alert to the poet's mood, acknowledging both his despair and his celebration; he finds much still to admire in man's ability to create 'New soothings, new amazements.'

Chapter 2 examines Crane's second long poem, 'Voyages.' The chapter will examine the relationship between 'At Melville's Tomb' and the 'Voyages' sequence. The title of 'Voyages' is a plural one; it refers to a literal voyage, the passage of a love affair, and the construction of the poem as it is being developed. The physical journey is from the Caribbean to the coast of North Labrador. It starts in San Salvador and ends in Belle Isle: 'Whose circles bridge, I know, (from palms to the severe / Chilled albatross's white immutability).' The journey from the tropics to an almost arctic region parallels the course of love: from beginning to end. The chapter will chart Crane's development of his muse figure, from the impersonal, mythical Helen who does not excite the poet, to 'Voyage's' siren-like lover. The poet's changed role, from observer to protagonist will be examined. Throughout this chapter, the poet's concern with Melville is acknowledged.

Chapters 3 to 6 follow Crane's progress through The Bridge to show that the format of this poem is a development of the styles of 'For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen' and 'Voyages.' The role of female symbols is examined through the changes of mood that occur within the poems. The way in which Crane suggests mood by past or present is also investigated. Chapter 3 introduces Crane's major symbol and his hopes for it. The chapter will discuss the symbolic suitability of this man-made structure, which, like the sea, is traditionally female. It establishes Crane's theme of quest, through the

stage-setting of 'Proem: To Brooklyn Bridge.' In the 'Proem,' the bridge is a religious platform which imitates the interceding associated with Mary, 'And of the curveship lend a myth to God.' 'Ave Maria', the poem which bridges east and west, is played out upon a demanding ocean: a 'third, of water' which 'tests the word.' The chapter will examine the way in which Columbus's voyage in 'Ave Maria' parallels the poet's fears and hopes for his own poetic quest.

Chapter 4 examines 'Powhatan's Daughter,' the longest section of The Bridge. The chapter is necessarily extensive as it explores and interprets the journey theme that propels the poet through 'The Harbor Dawn,' 'Van Winkle,' The River,' 'The Dance' and 'Indiana.' In 'The Harbor Dawn,' Pocahontas is the phantom who haunts the poem, aiding the poem's dream-like air, while in 'Van Winkle,' the image of the mother's 'Sabbatical, unconscious smile' disturbs memory. 'The River' too, is a traditional female symbol; here the river's twisting, seeking journey is the counterpart of the male poet's through the poem. In 'The Dance,' Pocahontas represents the land and fecundity; the emphasis is on reclamation. 'Indiana's' subject is a pioneer woman; the poem pivots uneasily upon the nature of her regrets, 'Won nothing out of fifty-nine— those years— / But gilded promise, yielded to us never, / And barren tears...' contrasting with 'There's where the stubborn years gleam and atone,— / Where gold is true!' Through a detailed reading of these poems, the chapter will investigate the significance of the pattern of ascent and descent that structure these poems.

Chapter 5 turns upon the poet's return to the present in 'Cutty Sark' and 'Cape Hatteras' and records the loss of female symbols and its effect upon the poem. Ships, again traditionally female, are the heroines of 'Cutty Sark,' 'Blithe Yankee vanities, turreted sprites, winged / British repartees, skil-

/ ful savage sea-girls.' Their appearance is part of the poet's brief vision. These two sections show the way in which the poem becomes much more masculine in tone after the vision of the ships fades. 'Cape Hatteras' is devoid of female attributes; even the female symbols of plane and ship are made masculine as the poem shifts its mood from the triumphant visionary ending of 'Cutty Sark' to the stark declaration that is Crane's vision of his own world:

> While Iliads glimmer through eyes raised in pride
> Hell's belt springs wider into heaven's plumed side.
> O bright circumferences, heights employed to fly
> War's fiery kennel masked in downy offings,—
> This tournament of space, the threshed and chiseled height,
> Is baited by marauding circles, bludgeon flail
> Of rancorous grenades whose screaming petals carve us
> Wounds that we wrap with theorems sharp as hail!
>
> (CH, 95-102)

The absence of female symbol will be related to the change from the positive and praising lines 'Distictly praise the years, whose volatile / Blamed bleeding hands extend and thresh the height'[124] to 'the threshed and chiseled height.' The language is that of war; 'screaming petals' fiercely excludes 'Creation's blithe and petalled word.' Instead the poet seeks guidance from a male poet, 'My hand / in yours, / Walt Whitman— / so—'. The chapter will show Crane's response to his own world and chart Crane's increasing disillusionment. This disillusionment will be weighted against the poet's dependence on Whitman. The 'Three Songs' section is also included in this chapter because after 'Cape

[124] 'For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen.'

Hatteras,' the poet seems to renounce his female symbols. 'Southern Cross,' in 'Three Songs,' is reviled through 'You crept out simmering, accomplished. / Water rattled that stinging coil.' The burlesque dancer in 'National Winter Garden' is likened to 'Mary Magdalene', while 'Virginia,' punning on its title, mocks 'Out of the way-up nickel-dime tower shine, / Cathedral Mary, / shine!—'

Chapter 6 explores the last section of The Bridge. 'Quaker Hill' has no female protagonists. In 'The Tunnel,' Crane descends and meets Helen again but she is mediated through Poe. The pattern of the poems works to show that while female symbolism is creative and its absence destructive, it always reasserts itself through poetry, 'Unceasing with some Word that will not die...!' The Bridge ends with a glorious and triumphal reintegration of the female bridge and the male poet in 'Atlantis'. Possibilities are stated, 'As though a god were issue of the strings....' and fulfilled, 'the orphic strings, / Sidereal phalanxes, leap and converge.'

Chapter 7 will analyse critical reaction to the poetry. The direction of Crane's poetry after The Bridge, in particular 'O Carib Isle' from 'Key West: An Island Sheaf,' will be examined. Although Crane's untimely death might be seen as a confirmation that despair prevails, I hope that my thesis will be a celebration of the poet's determination to pull hope from that despair for 'After this perfection of death—nothing is possible in motion but a resurrection of some kind.'[125]

[125] LHC 115.

Chapter 1

'For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen'

'There is some way, I think, to touch
Those hands of yours that count the nights' (F&H 1, 26-7)

In The Modern Poetic Sequence: the Genius of Modern Poetry, the authors make the point that the modern sequence is more successful than individual short lyrics because 'it fulfills the need for encompassment of disparate and often powerfully opposed tonalities and energies.'[1] Superficially, Crane's long poems epitomize this disparateness because the associations are symbolic and allusive rather than connective. In 'For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen,' Crane draws upon myth, a modern nightclub and war, but from these dissimilar subjects, the poet finds the common thread that stretches between Troy and New York and leads to visionary resolution. The poem never leaves the setting of the 'real' world; instead the poet imagines the effect of mythical figures upon his world. The investigative structure is retrospective; it begins with an adult Helen, then reverts to a younger version of Helen, and ends with Paris whose abduction of Helen began the Trojan War.

Crane also draws upon earlier poems to smooth the progress of 'For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen'. Ernest Smith, noting the deliberate

[1] M. L. Rosenthal and Sally M. Gall, The Modern Poetic Sequence: the Genius of Modern Poetry (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983) 3.

arrangement, argues that this infrastructure influences the reading of its poems:

> When lyric poems are placed in sequence, that sequence by its very nature interacts in such a way that the larger architecture of the project—be it a short sonnet sequence, a modernist long poem, or a volume—often defines the functions of the poems it contains. Particularly with a poet such as Crane, who counted on a constant reverberation and thickening of the connotations of words in his poems, a 'logic of metaphor,' poems not only influence, but depend upon one another for their imaginative life.[2]

Malcolm Cowley, helped by Crane to arrange Blue Juniata, explains that the order was of central importance to Crane: 'Hart believed that emotions, and the poems that expressed them, should follow one another in the right sequence. He thought naturally in terms of structure and "the book," which, he insisted, should be more than a random selection of poems by one author..."Really the book as we now have it," he said, "has astonishing structural sequence," thus ending the sentence with two of his favorite words.'[3]

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[2] Smith 3.

[3] Susan Jenkins Brown, Robber Rocks: Letters and Memories of Hart Crane 1923-1932 (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 1969.

Such intentions are evident in the arrangement of White Buildings where the poems are not entered in chronological order. The collection begins with 'Legend,' acting as a proem for the volume, and ends with 'Voyages' which acts as the closing poem because it picks up on preceding images and tones. The shorter poems at the beginning progress to the longer poems. 'For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen' was begun in the same year as 'Voyages' but completed earlier while 'Recitative,' which seemingly prepares for the longer poem, is later.[4] This arranged order, regardless of the time of composition, emphasizes Crane's awareness of his increasingly visionary imagination and the beginnings of a blueprint for Crane's visionary ideal. In the same way that the arranged order of White Buildings builds a visionary progression, the long poems, all built upon the need for an inspirational symbol, lead to the visionary pinnacle of The Bridge.

In 'For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen,' Crane puts his own interpretation upon the Faustian role to combat the 'devil' of his own time; the lack of vision in his own world. Northrop Frye understands alienation as the inevitable response to the modern world:

> The reason is that in a society like ours, a society of the accepted and adequately fed, the conception of alienation becomes psychological. In other words it becomes the devil

[4] CP. According to Marc Simons, 'For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen' was composed between March 1921 and late 1923 while 'Voyages' was written between October 1921 and April 1926 and 'Recitative' between October 1923 and March 1924.

> again, for the devil normally comes to those who have everything and are bored with it, like Faust.[5]

In this poem, Crane reinterprets the Faustian role to combat the 'devil' of his own time: the perception that 'something' is missing. Cultural theories about American literature suggest that this perception is commonly held.[6] Russel J. Reising argues 'Whereas Puritan origins theorists posit a strong *presence*—the Puritan allegorical vision or a Puritan rhetorical construct—as the enduring core of American literature, cultural theorists tend to define the continuity of American writing as an *absence*.'[7] Crane, as Faustus, fills this absence with Helen. Crane's post-Romantic objective pivots upon successfully imagining ('poetically' causing it to happen) the healing effect of a mythological figure upon his contemporary world. Smith believes that such an act of poetic creation 'becomes an overarching, transcendent act rather than a reconciling one' because the 'intractability of the problem is the pressure resulting from the effort to create Helen out of the impossible elements.'[8] This tension is evident in the pull between the poet's desire to share Helen with the world and the world's refusal to acknowledge Crane's symbol despite her presentation in three different ways.

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[5] Northrop Frye, 'City of the End of Things,' The Modern Century: The Whidden Lectures 1967 (Toronto: Oxford UP, 1967) 24.

[6] Russel J. Reisling, The Unusable Past (New York: Methuen, 1986) 93. Reisling argues that cultural theorists believe that literary strategies cover up the absence of an identifiable America that writers can draw upon.

[7] Reisling 92.

[8] Smith 95.

All three long poems hold out the promise of personal redemption to the poet in the form of inspiration, but Crane structures the search for salvation as if sharing it with the reader:

> The real evocation of this (to me) very real and absolute conception of beauty seemed to consist in a reconstruction in these modern terms of the basic emotional attitude towards beauty that the Greeks had. And in doing I found that I was really building a bridge between so-called classic experience and many divergent realities of our seething, confused cosmos of today, which has no formulated mythology yet for classic poetic reference or for religious exploitation.[9]

Crane's idea of the world is similar to the Platonic idea of the world; a flawed imitation of divine perfection. The long poems seek to improve our perception of the world. In this poem, Helen represents 'absolute beauty.' The poem suggests that by 'reclaiming' Helen, we will move closer to perfecting our idea of the world.

The poem is preceded by 'Recitative' which acts as an overture. Lewis argues that 'Recitative' is a 'rigorously compressed statement of Crane's general view, or of salient aspects of it.'[10] Giles argues that:

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[9] CPSL 217.

[10] Lewis 124.

> Crane discussed the relationship between romanticism and machinery, heart and crane, in his 1923 poem 'Recitative'—which he called a 'confession'—where the poet reluctantly admits the insufficiency of self-enclosed imagination and so attempts to build a bridge between himself and the decadent materialism of New York, 'Wrenched gold of Nineveh.'[11]

'Wrenched gold' also describe the way Crane pulls his poems from despair.

Its first stanza sets the scene. The presence of Helen is implied in 'Regard the capture here, O Janus-faced' while Crane, who is 'Janus-faced,' sees both past and present. 'The hands that twist this glass' increase in significance through 'the world dimensional for those untwisted by the love of things irreconcilable.' The 'brother-thief of time' in Part III of 'For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen' begins life as 'brother in the half.' 'White buildings' grow into 'white cities.' There is also the beginning of Crane's creed: 'Then watch / While darkness, like an ape's face, falls away,' and his response to it: 'And gradually white buildings answer day.'

The opening scene of 'For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen', with its skyscraper landscape and faceless people, is anticipated by lines in 'Recitative':

> Let the same nameless gulf beleaguer us—
> Alike suspend us from atrocious sums

[11] Giles 31. Giles uses lower case letters to begin 'heart' and 'crane' to stress the puns in Crane's poetry.

Built floor by floor on shafts of steel that grant

The plummet heart, like Absalom, no stream. (Rec,17-20)

All three long poems begin in the present of the poet's own world but become theoretical as Crane's imagination transforms images into symbols. Lewis states: 'Crane's mood of praise, here as always, emanated from the simple sense of his own creative ability.'[12] John Unterecker notes Crane's belief that a poem needed to be founded upon personal experience: 'The poet has to build a structure equivalent to but not descriptive of the experience on which the poem is founded. But he must never lose sight of the personal feeling which initiates the poem and which gives it much of its life.'[13]

In order to retain that reality and draw upon the normative assumptions of the reader, Crane uses symbols.[14] Arthur Symons' seminal book, The Symbolist Movement in Literature, was published in 1899 but still provides a useful definition: '"A symbol," says Comte Goblet d'Alviella, in his book on *The Migration of Symbols*, "might be defined as a representation which does not aim at being a reproduction."'[15] However, Symons argues that the modern use of symbols is complicated by the poet's awareness of the effect of using symbols:

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[12] Lewis 85.

[13] John Unterecker, Voyager: A Life of Hart Crane (New York: Farrar, 1969) 169.

[14] J. A. Cuddon, Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory (1977; London: Penguin, 1991): 'A symbol differs from an allegorical sign in that it has a real existence, whereas an allegorical sign is arbitrary.'

[15] Arthur Symons, The Symbolist Movement in Literature (1899; New York: Haskell, 1971) 2.

> What distinguishes the Symbolism of our day from the Symbolism of the past is that it has now become conscious of itself, in a sense in which it was unconscious even in Gérard de Nerval, to whom I trace the particular origin of the literature which I call Symbolist.[16]

Crane's use of symbol is self-conscious, the poetry is always ultimately about poetry; it takes itself as subject, asserting primacy through references to the written word which themselves are symbols.[17] Sherman Paul agrees, declaring 'Poetry, "the imaged Word," as he says in "Voyages VI," is a landmark of imagination, the sign of the unconquered spirit.'[18] Jamie McKendrick, reviewing the Bloodaxe edition of The Complete Poems, makes the point that this might alienate readers: 'To a great extent, the poignancy of these effects depends on the reader's feelings about writing being so unashamedly *about* writing.'[19] Only readers who press the text will be able to analyse these effects, otherwise they are part of the general suggestiveness of the poems.

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[16] Symons 3.

[17] Ernest Hemingway, A Farewell to Arms (1929; London: Cape, 1952) 161-162. The author denounces the assumptions that words induce: 'I was always embarrassed by the words sacred, glorious and sacrifice and the expression in vain.'

[18] Sherman Paul, Hart's 'Bridge' (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1972) 97.

[19] Jamie McKendrick, 'The Imaged Word,' rev. of Hart Crane: Complete Poems, ed. Brom Weber, Poetry Review 75 (1985): 51.

'For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen' begins in the city where there is no room for the imagination. Monroe K. Spears argues that the city itself is symbolic:

> The City is both massive fact and universally recognizable symbol of modernity, and it both constitutes and symbolizes the modern predicament: the mass man, anonymous and rootless, cut off from his past and from the nexus of human relations in which he formerly existed, anxious and insecure, enslaved by the mass media but left by the disappearance of God with a dreadful freedom of spiritual choice...[20]

These words explain the modern artist's predicament with the city; the crowded and anonymous symbol emphasizes isolation.

To combat isolation and alienation, the poet enacts a quest-journey, from the city to the imagination, in pursuit of inspiration. Crane's muse, Helen, is the 'way in' to the inspiration that the poet desires. Crane states, 'it was my intention to embody in modern terms (words, symbols, metaphors) a contemporary approximation to an ancient human culture or mythology.'[21] Crane's own précis of the poem is described thus:

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[20] Monroe K. Spears, Dionysus and the City: Modernism in Twentieth-Century Poetry (New York: Oxford UP, 1970) 74

[21] CPSL 217.

> The whole poem is a kind of fusion of our own time with the past. Almost every symbol of current significance is matched by a correlative, suggested or actually stated, 'of ancient days.' Helen, the symbol of this abstract 'sense of beauty,' Faustus the symbol of myself, the poetic or imaginative man of all times.[22]

Crane's poetic method of borrowing from the past, his 'hourless days,' means that Crane can explore the validity of his symbols as timeless and therefore relevant to contemporary society. In contrast, his own time is suggested by symbols which are temporary. Lewis understands these contrasts as part of the transition from the 'real' world to the imaginative one:

> That transition desired is better effected by the contrasts that begin to burgeon and intertwine: contrasts involving Helen's physical aspects taken as symbols; her smile, her eyes, her hands, her body. Helen's 'half-riant' expression (an unlucky Whitmanism) replaces the artificial 'stenographic smiles' of stanza one. Her 'eyes across the aisle' flicker with 'prefigurations,' as against the 'million brittle, bloodshot eyes' of the finite world; and, also as against that mob of eyes, the poet will bend upon Helen 'a lone eye....One inconspicuous glowing orb of phrase'—a lone eye, perhaps, because the other eye remains fixed upon the lower realm.[23]

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[22] LHC 120.

[23] Lewis 99.

Crane exploits the way we are conditioned to respond to symbols and their associated meaning. Helen's enduring role as a symbol raises questions about our need for symbols; more specifically in this poem, part of Crane's quest is to identify what we need from Helen.

To make the poetry more dramatic, inspiration is allegorized as a desirable woman, thereby introducing sexual and spiritual conflict. Conflict pervades the poem: Greek against Trojan, selfishness against love and the poet's hopes for his poem against his knowledge that these hopes cannot be fulfilled. Desire is also part of this conflict for, as Wallace Fowlie asserts: 'The form of love which is threatened or condemned is the only form treated in literature. The passion of love always maintains its primitive meaning which is that of suffering.'[24] Fowlie also believes that a poem can only examine the subject of love if it is overwhelming: 'And it has to be a certain kind of poem: that heightened burning expression of a metaphor which is love shorn of every lesser feeling and lesser act.'[25] Here, the poet suffers as he identifies and tries to release the true effect and meaning that the symbol gives to the poem. The concept that a woman's beauty can change the course of history is a metaphor for Crane's belief in the ability of poetry to do so; inspiration is the passion for which Crane yearns and struggles. As readers we tacitly share the search for an imaginative enhancement and (temporarily) suspend our doubts about any permanent resolution.

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[24] Wallace Fowlie, Love in Literature: Studies in Symbolic Expression (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1965. Rpt of The Clown's Grail: A Study of Love in its Literary Expression. 1948) 128.

[25] Fowlie 128.

Crane's attitude to Helen is personalized by his own act of authorial adaptation; she can become all that Crane wants her to be: the girl in the streetcar or the 'siren of the springs of guilty song.' She is also the forerunner of the Muse in 'Voyages'; she mocks and teases but always remains 'irreconcilable.' Fowlie believes that the way in which Helen's character is portrayed reflects the poet's ideas about himself, Helen and the world:

> The rôle of woman in a poet's work is closely associated with his feeling about the problem of good and evil. The poet's rite is his transformation of the universe into his own poetic universe. He counterfeits the essential gesture of the priest, and poetry, which is the changed substance, remains inviolate. The muse of poets is perhaps simultaneously Eve and Our Lady. Neither saint nor profane, the muse resembles all women and is no one of them.[26]

Crane's muse is, by necessity, aloof and mysterious, in order to distinguish her from modern woman whom Crane distrusted: 'Even the best of them, at times, know not and care not what they do. They have the faculty of producing very debilitating and thoroughly unprofitable effects on gentlemen who put themselves too much in their hands. Woman was not meant to occupy this position. It was only the Roman Catholic Church who gave it to her. Greeks, Romans and Egyptians knew better how to handle her.'[27]

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[26] Fowlie 136.

[27] LHC 79.

Crane's criticism does not prevent him from utilizing these images; he addresses Mary as intercessor in The Bridge.

Through the device of pursuing a mythical woman, Crane is at liberty to make of Helen what he wants. Helen, as an abstract symbol of beauty, has always been a particularly malleable symbol upon whom authors imprint their own definition. Mihoko Suzuki argues that Helen is a construct of the masculine imagination:

> From the Odyssey on, Helen is always present in the texts to be studied, but as a myth—either an emblem of doubleness or of duplicity on the one hand, or a trivial cardboard figure on the other—to be scapegoated and repudiated. As the figure of Helen becomes thus reduced, the poets create surrogate figures whom they endow with complexity and subjectivity as characters.[28]

Suzuki reads Helen as the victim of male writers but Helen's symbolic value is complicated by the variety of writers who have been 'inspired' by her despite her earlier representation where, David Ormerod and Christopher Wortham suggest, she 'represented, according to medieval moralised reading of Homer, the destructiveness of sensuality unchecked by moral restraint.'[29]

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[28] Mihoko Suzuki, Metamorphoses of Helen: Authority, Difference, and the Epic (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1989) 17.

[29] Christopher Marlowe, Dr Faustus: The A-Text, ed. David Ormerod and Christopher Wortham (Nedlands W.A.: U of Western Australia P, 1985) 142.

Philip R. Yannella, in 'Inventive Dust,' argues that Crane's version bears 'little resemblance to the historical or mythological Helen. In Crane's clearest formulation of her character and role she represents the speed, intensity, and dynamism of modern industrial-technological culture.'[30] Helen is the symbol of the imagination; the poem proposes that the modern world, without the influence of vision and imagination, will destroy itself. Within the modern setting, the poet suffers as he identifies and tries to release the true effect and meaning that the symbol gives to the poem.

Crane's aim in creating his muse is to construct both a metaphor for inspiration and a catalyst for it; inspiration and Helen are interchangeable here. M. D. Uroff makes the point that Crane's female figures are elusive, tantalizing and indifferent to the poet and that despite the passion of the poet, these muse figures 'remain cold and pure.'[31] This purity is not one of innocence; rather, it is a transparency upon which the poem imprints itself. In 'General Aims and Theories' Crane explaining his belief that the poet must hope 'to go *through* the combined materials of the poem,' argues:

> Such a poem is at least a stab at a truth, and to such an extent may be differentiated from other kinds of poetry and called 'absolute.' Its evocation will not be toward decoration or amusement, but rather toward a state of consciousness, an 'innocence' (Blake) or absolute beauty. In this condition there

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[30] Alan Trachtenberg, ed., Hart Crane: A Collection of Critical Essays (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1982) 183.

[31] Uroff 49.

> may be discoverable under new forms certain spiritual illuminations, shining with a morality essentialized from experience directly, and not from previous precepts or preconceptions.[32]

Crane's imaginative processes are set in motion by such a concept; his ideal is 'somewhere / Virginal perhaps, less fragmentary, cool' where love is imaged as the 'white wafer cheek of love' and the cold moonlight illuminates where 'the eaves meets snow.'

The poem begins in America after the end of the First World War, amid the disillusionment with the values that civilization had been previously based upon. Albert Einstein's ideas were transforming perceptions of the universe while writers and artists questioned and re-invented their art forms. Pound's creed of 'Make it new!' existed alongside the need to be sardonically truthful: 'The age demanded an image / Of its accelerated grimace.'[33] Hugh Selwyn Mauberly, published in 1920, is an example of disillusionment with the age. Perhaps Pound, as Michael Reck suggests, 'shared the disillusion of the soldiers who, as he tells in Mauberly':

> came home, home to a lie,
> home to many deceits,
> home to old lies and new infamy;

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[32] CPSL 220-221.

[33] Ezra Pound, Collected Shorter Poems (1952; London: Faber, 1984). Hereafter Pound, CSP.

usury age-old and age-thick

and liars in public places.[34] (Part IV)

Pound's poem expresses his feeling of being out of time in a world rushing towards war. While Crane's poem postdates the war, it expresses a similar feeling, but it is matched by his desire to present 'the most complete synthesis of human values.'[35] Increasingly concise, complex and allusive form became the norm. Monroe Spears reads 'For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen' as 'a very ambitious performance indeed, similar in intention to James Joyce's Ulysses and T. S. Eliot's The Waste Land in suggesting a fusion of present and past.'[36] Ulysses and The Waste Land were both published in 1922; Joyce's associative language can be detected in Crane's 'logic of metaphor.' In his famous letter to Harriet Monroe, Crane argued:

> To put it more plainly, as a poet I may very possibly be more interested in the so-called illogical impingements of the connotations of words on the consciousness (and their combinations and interplay in metaphor on this basis) than I am interested in the preservation of their logically rigid significance at the cost of limiting my subject matter and perceptions involved in the poem.[37]

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[34] Michael Reck, Ezra Pound: A Close-Up (London: Hart-Davis, 1968) 39.

[35] 'Modern Poetry,' CPSL 261.

[36] Spears 32.

[37] CPSL 234.

The Waste Land provided an example to both inspire and resist. Like The Waste Land, 'For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen' uses a contemporary urban setting. Each poem presents its author's position to the literary past through allusions to earlier literary texts. The Waste Land draws on the authority of the past as 'fragments I have shored against my ruins' (Line 430 in 'What the Thunder Said'). Robert Langbaum quotes Eliot's review of Ulysses for The Dial in November 1923 to 'show how modern anti-traditionalism clears the ground for modern traditionalism'[38]:

> In using the myth, in manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity, Mr Joyce is pursuing a method which others must pursue after him....It is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history.....Psychology (such as it is, and whether our reaction to it be comic or serious), ethnology, and The Golden Bough have concurred to make possible what was impossible even a few years ago. Instead of narrative method, we may now use the mythical method.[39]

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[38] Robert Langbaum, The Poetry of Experience: The Dramatic Monologue in Modern Literary Tradition (London: Chatto, 1957) 10.

[39] Langbaum 10-11.

'For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen' also evokes that past, but Crane attempts to bridge the gap between then and now by attempting to re-interpret the past as part of the present.

By 'borrowing' the associations involved with 'Helen' and 'Faustus,' as well as those from extended allusions, Crane's archetypes are validated as re-interpretations of faith which, the title implies, should be celebrated. The celebratory note of the title of the poem, Sherman Paul claims, 'is to be read also as meaning a movement *toward* reconciliation or marriage with the world.'[40] Paul's use of 'toward' underlines that this is an imaginative proposal; Crane's reconciliation is dependent upon an understanding that it is our vision of the world that needs to be transformed rather than the world itself.

Crane tries to release the power of the imagination by demonstrating its range in a similar way to Gerard Manley Hopkins who tried to reveal the world to man by making it part of the glory of God in poems such as 'Pied Beauty,' 'Spring' and 'The Windhover.'[41] Paralleling this struggle for imaginative release, the meaning of the text sometimes strains between being didactic and wanting to be redemptive.

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The first part of the poem examines the constraints of the modern world, acknowledging them as obstacles to be avoided if Crane is to pursue creativity. The images are designed to intimate boredom, lack of individuality

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[40] Paul 63.

[41] Gerard Manley Hopkins, The Poetical Works of Gerard Manley Hopkins, ed. Norman H.Mackenzie Oxford: Clarendon P, 1990. Hereafter Hopkins, PW.

and sterility, layering images in a similar fashion to the description of 'Stacked partitions.' Crane's task is to transform 'Baked and labeled dough' into the Eucharistic 'white wafer cheek of love.' Dough is also a pun on money; minds, the poem implies, are commodities to be bartered as Faustus barters his soul for Helen. There is also an emphasis on sameness. 'Multitudes' suggests the dullness of the ordinary but it also connotes Christ's sermon on the mount: 'And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him: And he opened his mouth, and taught them.'[42] This suggests that Crane perceives his role as redemptive.

In the first two stanzas, the poet delivers his rhetorical statement about his world, following on from the grand, rhetorical statement of the epigram.[43] It is declaratory as if Crane is impelled to specify the root of his own source of conflict within the poem. Textual allusions abound. The poem suggests mood through its arrangement on the page. The first two stanzas share a loose metrical pattern that helps to build up a feeling of sameness until the italicized section breaks in to interrupt the pattern and prepare for Helen's entrance into the poem.

Dashes and pauses draw attention to statements, here and throughout the poems. The first dash, after 'Across the stacked partitions of the day—,' is styled to suggest that the poet is so intimidated by his world that he cannot continue. The pause allows him to fight against his reluctance; he repeats 'Across' to recover: 'Across the memoranda, baseball scores.' The consonance of 'scores,' 'stenographic smiles,' 'stock,' and 'smutty' runs into

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[42] Matthew 5: 1-2.

[43] Ben Johnson, The Alchemist, ed. Ian Donaldson (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1985).

the last 's' of 'wings' and 'equivocations.' The effect makes the list seem endless and Crane's task daunting. 'Stenographic smiles' imply insincerity; 'stock quotations' ironically connote literary 'quotations' as 'stock' puns on its 'run of the mill' meaning. Crane allows no relief until the last line of this stanza, but this relief is swiftly gone in the welter of all five vowels and the number of consonants that make up 'Smutty wings' which 'flash out equivocations.'

Crane amplifies this phrase by transposing 'smutty wings' into 'sparrow wings' in the second stanza. The transition is smoothed by repetition; the change implies that these wings will set off a reaction and help clear out the 'memoranda.' Yet paradoxically, this hope is undone immediately with the realization that this stanza too starts with 'The Mind.' The poet is not yet ready to begin the process of transformation. While the first verse stressed division, the second stresses limitations; 'Numbers' are 'rebuffed by asphalt,' and 'crowd / The margins of the day.' Crane's poetry is pushed into 'the margins' by economical needs—he too is one of the numbers who 'rebuffed by asphalt, crowd / The margins of the day, accent the curbs.' Again, the written sign is stressed through 'brushed,' 'numbers,' and 'accent.' 'Convoying' suggests that the crowds are cargo to be carried home via 'druggist, barber and tobacconist.' While the workers of the first two stanzas return home, Crane is left alone to discover the imaginative abode that Poe describes in 'To Helen':

> Helen, thy beauty is to me
> Like those Nicéan barks of yore,

That gently, o'er a perfumed sea,
The weary, way-worn wanderer bore
To his own native shore.[44]

In similar vein, Paul suggests that the poem implies that 'the search for Beauty is a return, a homecoming to an ideal that once, in some earlier time and at a deep level of experience, was ours.'[45] Crane, by borrowing from the imagined experiences of the past, hopes to rediscover an ideal that lies beyond the drudgery of the day. The multitudes stream off and as the crowd reduces, Crane becomes more and more aware of his own isolation. Metaphorically, the poet moves through 'graduate opacities of evening' towards the darkness where he sees best. Crane's long poems all brave looking through darkness and solitude as part of the process of 'gazing toward paradise.'[46] As darkness descends, the poet imagines a retreat safely away from the heat of the city, 'to somewhere / Virginal perhaps, less fragmentary, cool.' 'Virginal' implies unspoiled in this context.

This haven is 'the world dimensional' and Crane is alone in it. He emphasizes its uniqueness by setting its lines apart from the stanzas and by using italicized prose:

There is the world dimensional for

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[44] Edgar Allan Poe, Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe, ed. Thomas Ollive Mabbott, vol.1 (Cambridge, MA: Belknap-Harvard UP, 1969). Hereafter Poe, CW. This is the first 'To Helen' poem and is part of 'Poems of 1831.'

[45] Paul 67.

[46] In The Bridge Crane declares 'Only in darkness is thy shadow clear.'

those untwisted by the love of things

irreconcilable...

The difficult syntax forces the reader to stop and assess what 'the world dimensional' means. 'Untwisted' refers to those who are not embittered by 'the love of things irreconcilable'; their reward is the 'world dimensional.' It also implies that 'the love of things irreconcilable' is the cause of corruption in Crane's contemporary world. The 'world dimensional,' following on from 'somewhere / Virginal perhaps, less fragmentary, cool,' implies that both lines describe the same place but as Smith argues 'nothing in the poem suggests that "world dimensional" is "the ideal being sought."'[47]

The origin of the 'world dimensional' is not known, although both Waldo Frank[48] and P. D. Ouspensky[49] have been suggested. In his letter to Allen Tate, Crane writes that:

> Frank has the real mystic's vision. His apprehensions astonish one. I have also enjoyed reading Ouspensky's Tertium Organum lately. Its corroboration of several experiences in consciousness that I have had gave it particular interest.[50]

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[47] Smith 94.

[48] Gorham B. Munson, Waldo Frank: A Study (New York: Liveright, 1923).

[49] P. D. Ouspensky, Tertium Organum: A Key to the Enigmas of the World, trans. Nicholas Bessaraboff and Claude Bragdon (1912; London:Routledge, 1973).

[50] LHC 124.

Lewis disagrees, arguing that there is nothing in Ouspensky's book that Crane 'could not find—had not already found—in the poetry of William Blake, or in Blake's younger Romantic contemporaries, or in Whitman or (expressed yet more suitably for his purpose, as I shall argue) in Emerson.'[51] Lewis's argument is generally borne out by the many allusions to Blake throughout Crane's long poems.

Naming the imaginative world allows Crane to begin his attempt to integrate his imagination into the 'real' world. M. L. Rosenthal argues that modern poetry's expression is essentially one of Romantic aestheticism where 'The Self seeks to discover itself through the sensuous excitement generated in it by its experience of reality.'[52] This mirrors Crane's technique; the poem changes from declamation to 'vision' as the poet, sitting in a streetcar, slides into his imagination. The image of the isolated poet within the crowded car is symbolic for the poet who asserts 'The street car device is the most concrete symbol I could find for the transition of the imagination from quotidian details to the universal consideration of beauty,—the body still "centered in traffic," the imagination eluding its daily nets and self consciousness.'[53] Using the word 'suppose' to leave the present for the 'what if' of imagination, Crane switches to direct address. 'Suppose some evening' is a hypothetical entrance to that world where he can be 'lost yet poised in traffic.' 'Lost but poised in traffic' also implies that Crane's imagination is both

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[51] Lewis 95.

[52] M. L. Rosenthal, The New Poets: American and British Poetry Since World War II (New York: Oxford UP, 1967) 13.

[53] LHC 120.

unsure and anticipatory but 'poised' to go where the street car and his modern-day Helen takes him.

Crane introduces Helen through the dream device; he sees Helen across the aisle of a streetcar stranded in the evening rush-hour. In a reverie, he recognizes her as the Helen of his imagination, but in this poem she also represents the imagination. The situation is both controlled and hypothetical: 'Then I *might* find your eyes across an aisle' (my italics). The 'jerky window frame' emphasizes that the car is shaking; Crane's imagination re-interprets these shakings as Helen's eyes 'Still flickering with those prefigurations.' The 'Prodigal' Helen has returned through the medium of the poet. 'Half-riant,' she mocks and teases to provoke him and to mark out the gap that laughing represents in Crane's poetry.

Crane attempts to fill this gap with a Helen whose qualities only he can divine. This Helen is 'uncontested now'; as the symbol of his imagination, she belongs only to the poet and while her name still connotes great beauty, she is no longer desired by the world. The tension caused by the poet's struggle to present his Helen to an uncaring world appears as notes of caution in the 'flashing out' of the first stanza, which the 'flickering' in the third reiterates. These images progress to 'the pink and green advertisements' that illuminate the darkness; they ironically comment on the way that the modern world packages everything as a product to be sold for commercial advantage. Crane's lack of sureness in how to convince is evident in 'I think': 'There is some way, I think, to touch / Those hands of yours that count the nights.' Although 'count' connects to the first stanza, it implies that the

imagination eagerly awaits the poet's arrangements to bring it to prominence. To pacify it, the poet emphasizes his pledge with 'And now,' and 'Imminent.'

While these words acknowledge the inevitability of time, 'And now, before its arteries turn dark' also suggests urgency. The imagination, represented by Helen, exists beyond the 'graduate opacities of evening' and is associated with night. Crane's transformation must take place before the possibilities of night change back into the stultifying city of day. 'Dream' emphasizes the imaginative nature of this episode. Paul argues that the 'arteries' are Helen's and a metaphor for the streets.[54] Yet 'its arteries' syntactically refers to 'this bartered blood' in the following line; 'bartered' reminds us of Faustus's pact with the devil and make clear that the arteries are the Faustus-poet's for 'Imminent in his dream, none better knows.' 'I would have you meet' concedes that this meeting is not in the present but fixed into an imaginary visionary future, it does not remove the suggestion that the poet must, like Faustus, barter himself. Crane offers himself as a supplicant: 'none better knows / The white wafer cheek of love, or offers words / Lightly as moonlight on the eaves meets snow.' The over-assonance in the last line emphasizes that this is poetic supplication.

'Reflective conversion of all things' is his reward.[55] The lights, reflected in windows, are transformed into what R. W. B. Lewis calls the 'celestial orgasm'[56]:

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[54] Paul 69.

[55] Transformation takes place in all the long poems; 'transmemberment' in 'Voyages' and the bridge into the 'loft of vision' in 'Atlantis.'

[56] Lewis 100.

At your deep blush, when ecstasies thread
The limbs and belly, when rainbows spread
Impinging on the throat and sides... (F&H 1, 35-7)

As Crane will do in 'Voyages', inspiration is described as physical ecstasy; he lists the parts of Helen's body that represent her sexuality to him; her limbs, belly, throat, sides and breasts. The imagination's 'Reflective conversion' has changed the illuminated advertisements into 'rainbows' which 'thread / Impinging on the throat and sides.' 'Impinging' alludes to the rape of Helen as the rainbows force themselves upon her[57], but the allusion is lost within the ellipsis that emphasizes the detachment between the world and Crane's imagination. Crane begins to force his reconciliation upon the poem through the suggestion that the disconnected world weeps for the 'hiatus / That winks above it, bluet in your breasts.' Helen is that hiatus, she represents the gap between imagination and reality. This recognition, the poem implies, is created from the poet's 'Reflective conversion.' Crane's direct address to Helen is persuasive; like an amorous suitor he tells her that 'the world weeps for her,' but this 'invention' crumbles under the weight of its responsibility. The poet is unable to prolong the suggestion that the world actually 'weeps' for Helen. The world weeps because Crane makes it; it is still disengaged.

'Inventive dust' describes Crane's imaginative re-making of Helen, and the world, but it is also a reminder of death's inevitability and 'The Burial of

[57] LHC 120. 'Symbolically, also, and in relation to Homer, this first part has significance of the rape of Helen by Paris.'

the Dead'[58] as well as of Thomas Nashe's line, 'Dust hath closèd Helen's eyes.'[59] Shadowy but transparent under the visionary gaze of the poet, the earth 'may glide diaphanous to death.' The poem has not imprinted itself upon the world and the poet is still alone in his imagination. While the poet speaks directly to Helen it is the concept of inspiration that is addressed: 'But if I lift my arms it is to bend / To you who turned away once, Helen.' Crane has already discovered the elusiveness of inspiration. Through his imaginative and personal interpretation of Helen, Crane hopes to attain, 'That world which comes to each of us alone.' The poet fears his abandonment by the muse, recognizing his own attempt to grasp her in 'the press of troubled hands, too alternate / With steel and soil to hold you endlessly.' Only his belief that he will one day 'meet' in 'that eventual flame' sustains him. The world, symbolized by 'their million brittle, bloodshot eyes,' and drifting towards destruction, is juxtaposed against Crane's imagined coupling with his muse and their promised Phoenix-like rise from the flames. Beyond lie Crane's 'white cities.' Until then, Crane is the 'Bent axle of devotion,' damaged but faithful, struggling onwards towards a goal he can never reach but to which he must aspire.

Milton describes sunset thus in 'Comus':

> And the gilded car of day
> His glowing axle doth allay

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[58] 'We therefore commit his body to the ground; earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust; in sure and certain hope of the Resurrection to eternal life.'

[59] Felix E. Schelling, ed., A Book of Elizabethan Lyrics (Boston: Ginn, 1895) 52-53.

In the steep Atlantic stream. (95-7)

The axle is associated with the sun; here the association suggests that Crane metaphorically pursues Helen, the imagined embodiment of inspiration, across the skies. Crane, as the sun and the 'lone eye,' needs to escape the diurnal prison of the world. The lovers meet fleetingly at the end of day; their brief passionate encounter is symbolized by sunrise's 'deep blush' then Helen leaves to re-ascend the heavens, unable to find a place in the world. Offering his 'lone eye' fixed on her alone, Crane, in a sustained rhythm like that employed by 'Repose of Rivers', gazes into the timeless world of the imagination and offers Helen the sum of sun, Faustus and poet in 'One inconspicuous glowing orb of phrase.'

II

Although Helen appears within the contemporary world in the first part of the poem, Crane maintains her disconnection; he constantly reminds us that she exists only in his imagination through words such as 'suppose.' In the second part of the poem, the muse appears in the setting of a metropolitan night club; again the poet associates her with night. The setting is similar to that of 'The Wine Menagerie,' in which Crane imagines himself as a drunken observer. In that poem, Crane attempts redemption through intoxication but is left contemplating his loneliness and the realization that his 'vision' is temporary: there, he is the silent watcher, 'conscripted to their shadows' glow,' as he watches the players in bottle reflections. Here, he uses 'we,' 'us,' 'me' and 'I' to place himself within the glittering gaudiness of the arena-like nightclub.

Within these 'metallic paradises', Crane will search for an epiphany similar to that described in 'The Wine Menagerie': 'Between black tusks the roses shine!' Smith sees one of the hallmarks of White Buildings as 'the ability to wrest a positive and often creative vision from a scene of degradation or humiliation.'[60] The poet's desire to wrest an affirmation is in contrast to the dancers who seek pleasure. Instead of 'New thresholds, new anatomies,' these dancers risk humiliation in their search for 'New soothings, new amazements.'

Lee Edelman argues that this second part owes much to T.S. Eliot: 'As it contains flashes of Eliot's wit and urbanity, so it shares, in the response to its flapper-like "siren," some of that anxiety experienced by Prufrock when he hears the mermaids "singing, each to each."'[61] Eliotic influence seems everywhere at this time; William Carlos Williams declared of Eliot's best known poem, The Waste Land: it 'wiped out our world as if an atom bomb had been dropped upon it and our brave sallies into the unknown were turned to dust.'[62] To resist Eliot's authority, Crane, who cannot avoid similarity with Eliot's urban setting and mythological allusions, attempts to make the poems redemptive rather than defeatist, but, as R.W. Butterfield points out: 'It is significant, indeed appropriate, that in a poem which aims to deny Eliot's pessimism, his voice should be most clearly heard in the section recording

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[60] Smith 99.

[61] Lee Edelman, Transmemberment of Song: Hart Crane's Anatomies of Rhetoric and Desire (Stanford CA: Stanford UP, 1987) 104.

[62] William Carlos Williams, The Autobiography of William Carlos Williams (1951; New York: New Directions, 1967) 174.

the temporary defeat of vision.'[63] I do not agree that this section represents 'the temporary defeat of vision': Crane's description of his muse is affectionate while the poet's overview of his world is more kindly and less critical than in the first part. Lewis also disagrees with Butterfield, arguing: 'Here the fallen world is explored—not as a domain of tears and death, but of dance and laughter; if not a world redeemed, at least a world redeemable.'[64]Lewis's statement is supported by Crane's comical view of love in this poem.

The first part of the poem describes a mature and experienced Helen 'who turned away once, Helen, knowing / The press of troubled hands.' In this second part, Crane offers us a Helen who 'is still so young' although he suggests her history through 'siren.' The first part confirmed Crane alone with his imagination. Here, he introduces his young muse to a 'cultivated storm.' An element of danger is necessary for the poem to work as a form of quest, so disturbing images lurk within the poem. The dancers are 'cuckoos,' lured on by siren finches. Unaware of danger they greet life 'naïvely—yet intrepidly.' Energized by the music, and freed from the confines of work, they are nocturnal, lively versions of the workers of the first part. Crane good-humoredly mocks the contemporary world as he compares it to that of the Gods of classical times or, as he describes it in his letter, the way in which 'the Dionysian revels of her court and her seduction were transferred to a

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[63] R. W. Butterfield, The Broken Arc: A Study of Hart Crane (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1969) 58-9.

[64] Lewis 102.

Metropolitan roof garden with a jazz orchestra.'[65] Crane transfers these images through connotative language. The poet jokingly aggrandizes the scene in the nightclub to emphasize its artifice; the roof garden is not the modern equivalent of Olympia, the night-clubbers are not Gods but breathless dancers who dance 'While nigger cupids scour the stars!' Despite Crane's light-hearted tone, there is an under-current of darkness. The cupids 'scour the stars' and ultimately wear away the brightness that the poet seeks. 'Brazen hypnotics glitter here' picks up on the mesmerizing factor of dancing to this music but 'brazen,' in the sense of 'unrepentant,' anticipates the rooster crowing: 'Until somewhere a rooster banters.' Through the idea of 'dancing until dawn', Crane also registers the motif of betrayal through the reference to the cock crowing.[66] As night fades, the authority of the day-world will reassert and Helen will have gone. This knowledge underwrites all the parts of 'For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen.' Consequently Crane, who still wants to possess the muse symbol, tries to expand that symbol beyond classical literature and Helen of Troy's identity.

The connection to the arterial imagery of the first part is found in the beat of the music which picks up from 'companion ways / That beat continuous.' That music is jazz, the 'springs of guilty song.' Implicit in the descriptions of the music is Crane's infatuation with it: 'The vocabulary of damnations and prostrations has been developed at the expense of these other moods, however, so that it is hard to dance in proper measure. Let us invent an idiom for the proper transposition of jazz into words! Something

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[65] 'General Aims and Theories,' CPSL 217.

[66] Matthew 26: 75.

clean, sparkling, elusive!'[67] As Barbara Herman notes, 'Crane found rich mines of language embedded both in contemporary life and the literary tradition.'[68] Crane's description of jazz applies to Helen too. Suzuki claims 'Like Eve and Pandora, Helen became a type of all women who bring woe to man'[69] but 'clean' disputes this. The muse here is 'still so young' that she is far removed from the women of 'The Wine Menagerie' who are compared to Judith, Salome and Petrushka's unnamed valentine and whose 'eyes, unmake an instant of the world...' Her music, 'clean, sparkling, elusive,' matches her youth.

Herman thinks that jazz is an inevitable choice for the poet: 'The terminology of the industrial world, with its scientific and technological subdivisions, gave Crane a fertile source of words; the other rich contemporaneous source was the colloquial idiom, slang and its proper 1920's partner, jazz.'[70] The music consists of 'snarling hails of melody.' Crane describes literally his figurative method of describing jazz music: 'Rhythmic ellipses lead into canters.' Crane's words mimic, in their rhythm and imagery, the rise and fall of the notes as the hedonistic dancers 'ricochet / From roof to roof,' searching for excitement and 'New soothings, new amazements.' The rhythm also anticipates the rises and falls in mood in the poems. 'Ricochet,' through its connection to the path of a bullet, acknowledges the danger that the dancers court in their hedonistic desire for

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[67] LHC 89.

[68] Barbara Herman, 'The Language of Hart Crane,' Sewanee Review 58 (1950) 57.

[69] Suzuki 13.

[70] Herman 58.

'New amazements.' Here, metre, rhyme and meaning textually emulate the music, as well as recalling the line, 'The earth may glide diaphanous to death.' As the music changes, to a more poignant beat, the dancers 'plaintively scud past shores / Where, by strange harmonic laws / All relatives, serene and cool, / Sit rocked in patent armchairs.' On a literal level, the 'relatives' are sitting out the dance while their feet, in patent shoes, tap out the rhythm but the pun on 'relative' implies that the dancers are measured against each other, while the pun on 'patent' suggests that these revels are a protected process, separating hedonistic night from work-grubbing day.

These dancers are under the spell of the music just as Crane is in thrall to inspiration. Crane makes the dance a ritual of choice; it is necessary for the dancers to choose to go onto the dance floor: 'And you may fall downstairs with me.' 'Fall downstairs' subtly suggests the fall of man and Adam and Eve's decision, but it also alludes to Crane's journey into the imagination. The music, like Crane's muse, can transport the dancers elsewhere; its tempo influences their state of mind.

The drumbeat running throughout the poem increases until it becomes 'the deft catastrophes of drums,' becoming a sexual enactment anticipating 'The Dance.' In the first part of the poem, Crane willed the muse into being through his erotic imaginings. Here the muse starts to slip away as the poem's sexual climax approaches because she is not involved. Crane teasingly reworks the jaded mood of Eliot's line from 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock': 'And I have known the arms already, known them all.'[71] The line becomes 'O, I have known metallic paradises.' The sexual 'groans of

[71] Eliot, CP.

death' are not related to 'ecstasies thread / The limbs and belly,' but Crane, instead of being repelled, lifts the poem by this comical view of 'modern love': 'Beneath gyrating awnings I have seen / The incunabula of the divine grotesque.'

The poet comments ironically 'This music has a reassuring way.' Despite the poet's mockery, he views his world and muse in the same way, using the plural 'we': 'We cannot frown upon her as she smiles.' These words recall Crane's statement in 'Chaplinesque': 'For we can still love the world, who find / A famished kitten on the step.' Edelman identifies 'the incandescent wax' as the highly-polished dance floor[72] but 'incandescent' also hints at 'white-hot' implying both passion and Crane's 'white cities.' The muse will always embody the poet's hopes for inspiration; 'Let us take her' signifies the poet's commitment to discover and capture it. Without that hope there are only lines appropriated from Hamlet to describe the present: 'Striated with nuances, nervosities / That we are heir to.'[73]

Helen's image begins to leave the poem from that moment of commitment; she merges into the 'slim skaters of the gardened skies.' The image of 'Dipping' insects hovering over a garden captures the ephemeral nature of the muse. In the first poem, Crane detailed the redemptive effect of Helen's beauty, but could not reconcile Helen with the world. In this second poem, the sexual attraction of the muse is still a potent source of power but Crane cannot grasp that power; she has eluded him. Smith writes 'Though Helen may seem the source of the degradation of part II, it is in actuality

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[72] Eliot, CP.

[73] 'The heartache and the thousand natural shocks / That flesh is heir to.' Hamlet 3.1. 64-5.

man's own imaginative capabilities which have failed him by embracing the physical and the temporal, and it is the imagination which must rise above despair in the poem's final section.'[74] This is the poet's task in the last section.

III

The last section is set in the 'now' of the post-war years, when 'tragedy of an immense scope was a very real event.'[75] 'Sixteen thrifty bridges' places the poet in New York, personalizing the poem. The poem is dense with allusion, making this part particularly problematic. Crane describes this final section as starting with *catharsis*, 'the acceptance of tragedy through destruction' and ending 'in a restatement of the imagination as in Part I.'[76] Crane's desire to 'affirm' is evident in the way that he makes it 'the persisting theme of the last part of "F and H,"'[77] and works to reinterpret the past. Lewis reads the poem as one of hope: 'Characteristically, this part is not about tragedy but the *transcendence* of tragedy.'[78] Acceptance begins with understanding; in order to understand the tragedy of the modern world, the poet must understand its parallel, the Trojan War. Paris and his judgment are traditionally blamed so the 'Capped arbiter of beauty in this street' is the figure of Paris representing Death, responsible for 'intricate slain numbers.'[79] Paris is placed within a

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[74] Smith 100.

[75] Lewis 109.

[76] LHC 121.

[77] LHC 115.

[78] Lewis 109.

[79] According to Cassell's Dictionary of Classical Mythology, Zeus forced Paris to choose which of the goddesses Hera, Athena and Aphrodite should receive the 'Apple of Discord,'

continuum of war. The mood of the poem has changed; instead of charting the effect of his muse, the poet is searching for a reconciliation to end the poem, but this reconciliation is based upon the knowledge that death is necessary for resurrection. To signal this acceptance of Death's place within the creative process, the poet metaphorically enters into a relationship with Death, 'here beside me.' This line is reworked in 'The Harbor Dawn' as 'And you beside me, blessèd now.' Crane's letter sums up his relationship with Death as 'the creator and the eternal destroyer dance arm in arm, etc.'[80] Death has replaced Helen as the 'delicate ambassador / Of intricate slain numbers,' recalling 'The press of troubled hands, too alternate / With steel and soil' from Part I. These numbers also recall the numbers, 'rebuffed by asphalt.'

The poet's aspirations have changed from 'Let us take her on the incandescent wax' to 'Let us unbind our throats of fear and pity.' Lewis believes that Crane names 'Fear and pity' because they are 'the emotions with which the tragic poet deals, according to Aristotle's Poetics.'[81] By 'unbinding' them, the poet is free to re-order the past for, Combs argues, Part III 'is a passionately felt re-ordering of experience.'[82] 'For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen' begins in the evening and continues through the night. Now night, like the poem, is ending and Crane awaits the return of the day in 'this street / That narrows darkly into motor dawn.' The emphasis on 'this

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inscribed 'for the fairest.' Aphrodite offered the love of the most beautiful woman in the world, Helen, wife of King Menelaus, as a bribe to Paris.

[80] LHC 121.

[81] Lewis 111.

street' places the poem within the world while the street, perspectively narrowing into the dawn, reminds us that the poet still seeks 'Beyond.'

In 'Legend,' Crane states that 'Until the bright logic is won,' the poet 'spends out himself again / Twice and twice / ...and yet again.' Crane cannot reveal 'the bright logic' until, as Lewis so aptly puts it, 'the element of guilt in the guilty song is exorcised.'[83] The poem suggests that if the past is forgotten, the present is the less; by denying Paris, we kill him and deny ourselves. Paris's death is foretold in 'Who faithfully, yourself, will fall too soon, / And in other ways.' These words recall John Donne's in 'Divine Meditations, No.10: 'One short sleep past, we wake eternally, / And death shall be no more, Death thou shalt die.'[84] Donne's words are premised upon eternal life while Crane's echo the theme of Part I; metaphorically the world is a form of living death unless it is transformed by the imagination. 'Let us unbind our throats of fear and pity' is the first step in that transformation but the magnitude of the action temporarily silences the poet's thoughts. Despite his Faustian control, this is still the poet who revealed his lack of sureness in 'There is some way, I think, to touch / Those hands' and who notes the 'nervosities / That we are heir to' in 'the incandescent wax / Striated with nuances.'

The poet recovers after a pause and begins the second stanza with 'We even.' The poem has moved beyond ascribing blame to accepting it

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[82] Combs 92.

[83] Lewis 108.

[84] John Donne, The Complete English Poems, ed., A. J. Smith (1971; London: Penguin, 1996). Hereafter Donne, CP.

within the plural 'we': 'We even, / Who drove speediest destruction.' Acknowledging 'the eternal soldier,' Crane likens the warmongering of times past, the 'eternal gunman' and the bowmen of old with their 'tensile boughs,' to the pilots of the First World War, 'Who hurried the hill breezes, spouting malice / Plangent over meadows.' The scene of Part II has metamorphosed; the 'slim skaters of the gardened skies' have turned into war-planes while music with its 'reassuring way' is now 'plangent.' The past tense of the verbs makes this a memory where fear, which will have to be unbound by the poet, was sown instead of seed. As air attacks destroy the landscape, Crane adds pathos by acknowledging the 'rifts of torn and empty houses' and personifying them: 'Like old women with teeth unjubilant,' recalling Pound's 'For an old bitch gone in the teeth.'[85] Pound's poem continues 'For a botched civilization'; the lines imply that death for an unworthy cause is unproductive. Helen, personifying the imagination, is not an 'old bitch gone in the teeth' but she waits 'faintly, briefly and in vain' without Crane's help.

Crane's poem refutes the idea of wasted sacrifice; his experience of Helen will be part of his reconciliation. This reconciliation must also allow for man's warlike nature; 'we' and 'our,' shares out responsibility for 'We know, eternal gunmen, our flesh remembers.' In a letter to Gorham Munson, Crane writes of the last section: 'I think I shall not attempt to make it the paragon of SPEED[86] that I thought of. I think it needs more sheer weight than such a motive would provide. Beyond this I have only the surety that it is, of course,

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[85] Part V of 'Hugh Selwyn Mauberly. Pound, CSP. '

[86] Crane's capitals.

to include a comment on the world war—and be Promethean in mood.'[87] Prometheus is the symbolic benefactor of mankind, giving fire. Crane as the creator of mood in the poem assumes the Promethean role in the present tense:

> We know, eternal gunman, our flesh remembers
> The tensile boughs, the nimble blue plateaus,
> The mounted, yielding cities of the air! (F&H 3, 19-21)

The 'mounted yielding cities' are the Promethean version of Crane's 'white cities.'

To demonstrate the continuum between ancient and modern man, the poet describes the fighter planes riding the sky and uses the phrase 'mounted' and 'saddled' to slip back through America's history of the cowboy. The mythic beginning of Greek civilization, with Prometheus 'shaking down' 'vertical / Repeated play of fire' on mankind is also intimated. Zeus hurling thunderbolts at Prometheus is re-enacted in 'no hypogeum / Of wave or rock was good against one hour.' Crane is spokesperson for himself and Helen and Paris: 'We did not ask for that, but have survived, / And will persist to speak again before / All stubble streets that have not curved / To memory' (F&H 3, 25-28).

The poet's use of 'have' suggests that the gods survive as long as man remembers them. Crane's statement about mythologies and faiths is relevant here:

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[87] LHC 98.

> Yet much of their traditions are operative still—in millions of chance combinations of related and unrelated detail, psychological reference, figures of speech, precepts, etc. These are all a part of our common experience and the terms, at least partially, of that very experience when it defines or extends itself.[88]

'Stubble streets' connotes all worlds of the imagination not just 'this street' of the poet's world. The poet is determined that his poem will not be a 'waste land,' the past will not be forgotten, and from the scythed stubble, new life and new poems will grow. The image of 'stubble' becoming new growth is paralleled by the interplay between words; stubble guides the reader to the scything action of 'the ominous lifted arm' and then to the arc of Helen's brows as she frowns or smiles. 'All stubble streets that have not curved / To memory' will re-emerge in 'The Tunnel' as 'phonographs of hades in the brain' while the brow arch will become 'this great wink of eternity' in 'Voyages II.' The syntax implies that speaker and memory serve the same purpose; they exist until the scything 'ominous lifted arm' closes Helen's eyes for good.

'Blessing and dismay' herald 'A goose, tobacco and cologne.' The list is enigmatic; although the tobacco and cologne tally with the tobacconist and barber of the first part, it is difficult to reconcile the goose with the druggist Lewis relates them to a newspaper story, which intrigued Crane, about the arrest of a man for stealing a goose, some tobacco and a bottle of cologne

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[88] 'General Aims and Theories,' CPSL 218.

from a general store.[89] Symbolically, they are the modern equivalent of the gifts of the three Wise men: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.[90] Three is also present in 'Three winged and gold-shod prophecies of heaven' which returns the poem to the Trojan war through the reference to Cassandra, Paris's sister. Cassandra was taught the art of prophecy by Apollo, the winged god, in exchange for sexual favours. She reneged on her promise so Apollo cursed her by condemning her to being disbelieved.[91] Crane also struggles to be believed; the poet's role, through the pun on heart / Hart, is to balance and atone, to 'leaven' the 'baked and labeled dough.' 'Conscript dust' emphasizes inevitability; it moves on from 'inventive dust' so that the 'diaphanous' world with its 'abating shadows' can be redeemed. 'Bells and voices' work in the same way as 'buds and bells and stars without a name' work in 'Ode to Psyche'.[92] These sounds attempt to fill the gap in the way that the bluet attempt to fill the hiatus between Helen and the world.

The past is put into perspective by the poet as he demonstrates the debt to it that the present owes. Crane's line, 'Anchises' navel, dripping of the sea' refers to the Trojan hero, Aeneas, fathered by Anchises. Virgil describes how Aeneas was shipwrecked and emerged from the sea to found Rome:

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[89] Lewis 115.

[90] Crane's metaphors might be ironic; the 'golden goose' instead of gold, tobacco burning instead of frankincence and cologne which, like myrrh, is used in perfumery.

[91] Cassell. When Paris returned to Troy, Cassandra predicted that he would bring disaster on the city; when Paris was about to visit King Menelaus, she warned of the consequences and when the Greeks left the wooden horse outside the city, she warned that it was a trick.

[92] Keats, SP.

> Aeneas now put in: and the Trojans, aching for dry land,
> Tumbled out of their ships onto the sands they craved so,
> And laid their limbs, crusted with brine, upon the shore.[93]

The son of Anchises bridges the two ancient civilizations of Greek and Rome. Erasmus, whose hands 'dipped in gleaming tides, / Gathered the voltage of brown blood and vine,' is often described as the precursor of the Reformation because he fought against corruption in the established Church. 'Hands' and 'blood' also gather in the threads of Part I. Anchises and Erasmus are both described in terms of their restorative value; in consequence they 'Delve upward for the new and scattered wine' like the poet's aspirations.

Both Death, the 'brother-thief' of Paris, and Crane, representing the imaginative life, are contenders for time, 'the meagre penance of their days' which reinforces 'and atones' in line 35. By acknowledging Paris's actions, the poet makes a form of atonement that ends the spiritual nullity that 'dare not share with us the breath released.' This line echoes a line by Lord Alfred Douglas in 'Two Loves': 'I am the love that dare not speak its name.' The echo suggests fear of rejection or failure. While the 'substance drilled and spent beyond repair' is worth losing in the quest for 'golden hair,' the poet fears that his quest might only find 'the shadow of gold hair.' Again the poem leans on 'Legend' to reiterate its point: 'It is to be learned— / This cleaving and this burning, / But only by the one who / Spends out himself again.'

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[93] Virgil, The Aeneid, trans. C. Day Lewis (Oxford: World's Classics, Oxford UP, 1986) Book 1. 171-3.

Despite this fear, the poet will continue to 'spend out himself' to achieve 'a restatement of the imagination.'[94]

The poem becomes a prayer of thanksgiving as it 'Distinctly praise[s] the years.' Lewis calls the poem 'a song for the reconciliation and marriage between two dimensions of existence.'[95] The poem has proved that the 'volatile / Blamed bleeding hands' of history should not be forgotten for the reverberations of the past continue to 'extend and thresh the height.' Within this acceptance, Crane finds redemption; the memories that 'thresh' create the 'stubble streets' that time's scythe has cut down to force new growth. The poet's 'bartered blood' is gladly sacrificed for an imagination that 'spans beyond despair, / Outpacing bargain, vocable and prayer.'

Crane's first long poem begins a pattern of sustained, suggestive richness that will increase in 'Voyages' and reach a zenith in The Bridge. This richness both enhances and makes difficult. Lewis believes that the poem's 'initial difficulty is due in part to a language that is often doing several things at once, and sometimes pointing in more than one direction at a time.'[96] While Crane's reconciliation of world and imagination is sometimes forced, if, as readers, we open ourselves to the poet's suggestions, we too can grasp the moment of an imagination that 'spans beyond despair.'

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[94] LHC 121.

[95] Lewis 83.

[96] Lewis 91.

Chapter 2

'Voyages'

'Complete the dark confessions her veins spell.' (V-2, 15)

In a letter to Waldo Frank,[1] Crane, enthusing about his meeting with Emil Opffer, wrote 'I have seen the Word made Flesh. I mean nothing less, and I know now that there is such a thing as indestructibility.'[2] 'Voyages' is a sequence of six poems that expresses a yearning for love, presumed to reflect the love affair between Crane and Opffer. The six poems follow a traditional pattern of discovery, loss and solace in which the poet is transformed and renewed through suffering after passionately experiencing his muse. Within this thesis, 'experience' is understood as both actual and imaginary acquaintance with facts and events, according with Crane's explanation that 'Poetry, in so far as the metaphysics of any absolute knowledge extends, is simply the concrete *evidence* of the *experience* of a recognition (*knowledge* if you like). It can give you a *ratio* of fact and experience, and in this sense it is both perception and thing perceived, according as it approaches a significant articulation or not.'[3] R. W. B. Lewis reads 'Voyages' as a conventional form of romance in that it tells of an experience of earthly love which is 'broken off by the departure or death of the beloved, whereupon the poet-lover finds

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[1] LHC 181.

[2] Kenneth Lohf's description of Crane's White Buildings manuscript, notes that Crane typed '"April – 24 / to EO"' on the lower right of his 'Voyages IV' sheet in Kenneth A. Lohf, ed,. The Literary Manuscripts of Hart Crane (Ohio State UP, 1967) 4.

[3] LHC 237.

consolation and a more permanent kind of gratification in a vision of transcendent beauty or of God or paradise; and in his own poetic narrative of the whole affair.'[4] This is an admirable summing-up of the sequence, emphasizing Crane's awareness of loss and recovery and his concern with inspiration as a spiritual symbol. The poet pursues his muse and 'knows' her for a brief moment but she escapes and he is left forlorn until he finds solace in acceptance. Through the poet's fascination with the sea, the poems gradually define the sea as the poet's muse.

The sea is traditionally female and Crane emphasizes its feminine nature repeatedly. 'Above the fresh ruffles of the surf' introduces the idea of frilled clothing from the foam. 'Ruffled' also implies that the serenity of the scene will be breached. Gender differences highlight the division between Crane and the sea; the poems will witness the poet's seduction of the sea and his rejection by it. These differences promote the idea of the sea as a medium in which the poet can be renewed; 'undinal vast belly' symbolizes the sea's fecundity and regenerative powers. 'Undinal' also suggests that the poet wants to believe that the sea will compromise her immortality for him.[5] This tension between what the poet expects and the sea's actions helps emphasize their difference. In addition, Crane's use of a female muse implies that the muse will necessarily remain 'other' because Crane can never truly know her. M. D. Uroff argues that the poet does not want a human love for 'By exalting the object of his devotion, he makes her inaccessible, "unsearchable," and at the same time more intensely desirable.'[6] The poet's inability to be truly united with the sea creates a longing which itself is productive, for, as Graves argues: 'A poet cannot continue to be a poet if he

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[4] Lewis 151.

[5] Undine was a water sprite who gave up her immortality to bear a child to a mortal.

[6] Uroff 9.

feels that he has made a permanent conquest of the Muse, that she is always his for the asking.'[7]

Although 'Voyages' reads as a highly emotive and personal series of poems, its power is proof of Crane's technical expertise because its retrospective framework unites a group of poems not written chronologically. The set is preceded by 'At Melville's Tomb.' Like 'Recitative' before 'For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen', 'At Melville's Tomb' acts as an overture although it was composed shortly before Crane completed 'Voyages.' While the title refers to Melville, it is the crew of the Pequod who rest in the sea-tomb, suggesting that the author is defined by his characters, as is Crane, who, in these poems, investigates the power of the sea entirely through his own responses as watcher, protagonist and commentator. He is the unseen watcher in 'Voyages I'; forewarned by 'Melville's Tomb,' he longs to warn the children: 'And could they hear me I would tell them.' In this way, Crane aligns himself with the Melville of Crane's poem who 'saw' and 'watched.' 'Voyages III' witnesses Crane as the enthusiastic participant who believes that he can move beyond Melville's passivity by entreating the sea, 'Permit me voyage, love, into your hands...' In 'Voyages' Crane will seek to re-interpret Melville's 'fabulous shadow' but must take note that 'monody' will not help him. The poet will only succeed if he does not allow despair to overwhelm the poems.

'Voyages I'

'Voyages I' begins in the present and then slips into a dream mode; the changing imagery of the dream permits Crane to explore his reactions to the imagined experiences that follow his immersion in the second poem. Crane is invisible in this first poem and he is denied voice; to regain his voice he must set out on a perilous journey. The journey is structured by Crane's attempt to

[7] Graves 444.

recreate a moment of understanding that typifies the Romantic idea that all eternity can be captured in a moment. This 'moment' is never defined only described in goal-like terms: 'Close round one instant in one floating flower,' 'permit me voyage, love, into your hands,' and 'In this expectant, still exclaim, receive / The secret oar and petals of all love.' As soon as the poet thinks he has succeeded, his moment eludes him, creating anxiety and a feeling that the quest is doomed to be repeated, over and over again. Each consequent attempt, however similar, can only create a new 'moment'; the original experience can never be repeated, echoing Melville's warning in Chapter 58 of Moby Dick: 'Push not off from that isle, thou canst never return.'[8] Crane's retrospective examination of 'At Melville's Tomb' structures 'Voyages'; the drowning of the sailors parallels the poet's voluntary 'drowning' when he is overwhelmed by desire in the third poem.

The present tense accentuates the dream aspect, but in effect, the poem is 'happening' outside of time. Graves understands this type of suspension as a poetic technique for 'In the poetic act, time is suspended and details of future experience often become incorporated in the poem, as they do in dreams.'[9] The sequence ends after Crane's world dissolves literally, when the poet is freed to find consolation in acceptance: 'The cables of our sleep so swiftly filed, / Already hang, shred ends from remembered stars.' This movement from the imaginative dream state back to the present is again typical of dream vision. According to Graves, 'The sudden shock of a return to the familiar temporal mode of thought is typified in the myths by the breaking of the saddle girth when the young hero rides back home on a visit from the Island. His foot touches the ground and the charm is broken: "then

[8] Herman Melville, Moby Dick (1851;London: Penguin, 1994) 271.

[9] Graves 343.

the troubles of old age and sickness fall upon him.'"[10] In similar vein in 'Voyages,' Crane's world dissolves and he returns to the 'real' world but instead of suffering 'old age and sickness', the poet is left older and wiser for his experience.

From the beginning of the sequence, the greater emphasis is always upon the sea. The idea of the innocent children who 'fondle' their shells is contrasted with the 'caresses' of the sea which destroys trespassers because it is 'Too lichen-faithful from too wide a breast.' Danger is a constant presence in these poems; Lewis reads this danger through the poet's interpretation of what the sea represents to him: '"Voyages I" introduces the theme of experience—represented, for Crane as for Herman Melville, by the dangerous but inviting sea and taking the specific form of a sea-journey which at the same time is and stands for a journey into love.'[11] Hanley explains the poet's viewpoint as that from a moving ship to explain the shifting images and the 'dancing' of islands.[12] Both critics acknowledge the importance of the sea as the medium upon which the poems are played out. Crane, in his letters promotes the idea that the sea exerted an influence upon him, by declaring 'I think the sea has thrown itself upon me and been answered, at least in part, and I believe I am a little changed—not essentially, but changed and transubstantiated as anyone is who has asked a question and been answered.'[13] Crane's comment, intimating his private feelings, still betrays his anxiety to fix upon the definitive 'thing' that will confirm his quest. Rather than the sea throwing itself upon the poet, the poet will throw himself into the sea in

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[10] Graves 344.

[11] Lewis 152.

[12] Alfred Hanley, Hart Crane's Holy Vision: 'White Buildings' (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne UP, 1981) 160.

[13] LHC 182.

search of 'transmemberment' and enlightenment. Again and again, the poet explores his feelings about the sea by attempting to name and describe it but he is always resisted; as soon as the poet defines one aspect, the description becomes inadequate, and he is forced to try once more.

The sea inspires the poet but awes him too; his quest is constantly hampered by his fears that he will be abandoned by the sea unless he can grasp its essential meaning. Yet to do so is to risk metaphorical death, symbolized by the death of the sailors in 'At Melville's Tomb' and the warnings to the children in the first poem. In this set of poems, the sea, according to Combs, 'represents the phenomenal world which, seen from a protected point of view, seems manageable and attractive, but which, entered upon, is uncontrollably destructive.'[14] The warning that the line between beach and sea must not be crossed is accentuated by the threat that the sea will crush the children like ship's rigging through the metaphor of the children's rib-cages as 'spry cordage.' There is warning in the 'bright striped urchins' whose clothes bear the lash-marks of the sea when 'Its lashings' are not 'charmed' and its 'malice' not 'reconciled' by death like the sea in 'At Melville's Tomb.' Even in this first piece where the sea seems innocent, danger lurks within Crane's verbs as 'The sun *beats* lightening on the waves' and 'The waves *fold thunder* on the sand.' The verbs of action are restrained by the timelessness of the piece, but the effect of sun and waves and children playing on the beach is deceptive for death has crossed over from the 'dusty shore' of 'Melville's Tomb.' The dead are here in the desiccated remains of 'shell shucks', and 'fragments of 'baked weed' which have been 'bleached by time,' after their ejection from 'Melville's Tomb':

Often beneath the wave, wide from this ledge

[14] Combs 96.

The dice of drowned men's bones he saw bequeath
An embassy. (AMT, 1-3)

In that poem, the sea threw, like dice, the sailors' remains upon the beach. Their 'embassy' acts as a spur to the poet who longs to decipher their message, and to 'know' and complete their experience, despite its danger. As previously stated, Crane sets up the idea that the sea is dangerous from his warning that the line between sand and sea must not be crossed; at the same time he commits himself to crossing this literal and metaphorical line between himself and the sea. Like the children, he, too, will 'contrive a conquest.' This contrast of danger and attraction provides the tension within the poem. Crane will 'crumble fragments' of memory, 'digging' and 'scattering' for inspiration. The poems will seek love against a backdrop of death; in consequence they are filled with oppositions of knowledge and innocence, acceptance and rejection, silence and noise and admission and expulsion. Fowlie argues that this is the dilemma of the homosexual 'who, of the sex act, knows only its aspect of death and never its meaning of birth. Copulation, or even the desire for copulation, without the death and the birth together is the darkest and most insoluble experience of man.'[15] While the images are those of coitus, the poem does not distinguish between heterosexual and homosexual love, perhaps to increase the appeal of the poem or to protect the poet. In a letter to Gorham Munson, Crane makes clear his awareness of the complications involved:

[15] Fowlie 134.

> I discover that I have been all-too easy all along in letting out announcements of my sexual predilections. Not that anything unpleasant has happened or is imminent. But it does put me into obligatory relations to a certain extent with 'those who are in the know', and this irks me to think of sometimes. After all, when you're dead it doesn't matter, and this statement proves my immunity from any 'shame' about it. But I find the ordinary business of 'earning a living' entirely too stringent to want to add any prejudices against me of that nature in the minds of any publicans and sinners.[16]

In the last poem, Crane addresses himself as 'Thy derelict and blinded guest,' a reference to Teiresias who knew both male and female natures. Crane's task is to resolve and 'move beyond' these differences to 'make' his poem.

Crane's mystical journey requires him to put himself at risk, like Ishmael, so that he too, can be flung beyond his imagination. Langdon Hammer believes that Crane's mystical role is important to the poet because it allows him to identify 'with Whitman and, as we will see, Melville, in which Crane could see himself as a national poet and a homosexual one *at once*, a role in which he could imagine removing his cover, and doing away with the "compartments" in his life.'[17] Melville will not be wakened by Crane's 'Monody' but his influence lies over 'Voyages' like a 'fabulous shadow.' Despite Hammer's gloss, 'Voyages' is told in the guise of a heterosexual love affair, but this is only part of the overall design of the poem. 'Fondle your

[16] Langdon Hammer and Brom Weber, eds., O My Land, My Friends: The Selected Letters of Hart Crane (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1997) 138.

[17] Langdon Hammer, Hart Crane and Allen Tate: Janus-faced Modernism (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1993) 129.

shells and sticks' has homo-erotic overtones but both shells and sticks are lifeless remains compared to the life and movement within the poems.

The first poem sets up the idea that 'Voyages' is a quest for knowledge and that Crane will attempt to answer the children's 'treble interjections.' Edelman suggests that 'the sea becomes a medium through which questions and answers are passed and in which material reduction and poetic reconstruction take place at the same time.'[18] Through his responses to the imagined encounters within the poems, Crane will try to seek answers beyond those questions suggested in 'At Melville's Tomb.' There, the poem describes how the drowning sailors, being swallowed by the vortex of the sea, gaze heavenwards:

> Then in the circuit calm of one vast coil,
> Its lashings charmed and malice reconciled,
> Frosted eyes there were that lifted altars. (AMT, 9-11)

Again, the reference stems from Moby Dick:

> And now, concentric circles seized the lone boat itself, and all its crew, and each floating oar, and every lance-pole, and spinning, animate and inanimate, all round and round in one vortex, carried the smallest chip of the Pequod out of sight.[19]

Melville's 'floating oar' is a constant symbol in 'Voyages' as is 'flower' which connotes the 'calyx of death's bounty.' Here, the poet replays the death of the Pequod's crew, but he insinuates an act of looking upwards, in a 'gaze toward

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[18] Edelman 128.

[19] Melville 535.

paradise' which acknowledges man's need to believe in something. Crane too, will spin towards his own vortex of 'whirling pillars and lithe pediments.' He too, will imitate the lifted eyes of the sailors in the 'seal's wide spindrift gaze toward paradise' and, on their behalf, interpret and complete 'the dark confessions her veins spell.' By reliving the experience of 'At Melville's Tomb,' Crane will seek his answer in 'the vortex of our grave.' Lured on by his own aspirations, he will set out from 'Voyages I,' which Leibowitz describes as a 'prelude to the orchestrated themes and feelings that follow, the voyage outward to love and death.'[20] Leibowitz's statement pairs love and death as the poet's destination but death lurks in these poems from the beginning. Crane's journey will be an attempt to reconcile love and death, to make drowning an act of baptism.

To move onwards and beyond 'At Melville's Tomb,' the poet must differentiate between its silent death scene and the possibilities of 'Voyages.' 'At Melville's Tomb' is a silent poem, its 'wrecks passed without sound of bells' while 'silent answers crept across the stars.' As 'Voyages' is a poetic quest, it contains some song to symbolically represent the voice of poetry: 'Bells off San Salvador,' 'diapason knells,' 'Adagios of islands,' 'laughing,' 'singing,' and 'the silken skilled transmemberment of song.' In the 'real' world of the beach, Crane is denied speech, evidenced by 'And could they hear me I would tell them.' 'Voyages' will be a quest to renew and extend that voice in the world of the imagination.

'Voyages II'

[20] Leibowitz 82.

Enjambement takes the reader seamlessly from 'Voyages I' to the second poem. Crane uses a dash to underline his entrance as protagonist; '—And yet' signals that the poet has begun his imaginative journey. Puns and metaphors are used to suggest immensity, in deference to the sea, Crane's mistress. 'This great wink of eternity' emphasizes the relentlessness of the sea; the wink suggests the pull of the tide and connects to 'rimless.' In addition, the vast curve of the belly echoes the curve of the eyelid while the complicity implied by the wink prepares for 'Laughing the wrapt inflections of our love.' 'Wrapt' is a pun on rapt. The wink also introduces a salacious note for Crane's attempted conquest of the sea will begin when he penetrates it. Crane uses sexual imagery because it allows him to metaphorically 'seduce' the sea as if it were a lover; their children will be new poems.[21] Gregory Woods argues that 'If the body is literature, to generate more bodies one's literary activities must be sexual, and one's sexual activities must be literary.'[22] His argument seems to have developed from that of Roland Barthes, quoted in Woods, who stated that 'there can be no distinction between the structure of ejaculation and that of language.'[23] Both suggest a connection between an outpouring of words and passion, like George Steiner's classification, quoted in Woods, that 'sexual intercourse' is a 'profoundly semantic act.'[24]

[21] See footnote 95 in 'Introduction.'

[22] Woods 114.

[23] Woods 115.

[24] Woods 114.

Ankey Larabee describes 'Voyages' as a celebration of the interrelation of passion and death, with the sea as Crane's symbol for this union.[25] His reading acknowledges the importance of passion in the poems; instead of love, he claims that 'These poinsettia meadows of her tides,' and 'the dark confessions her veins spill' are images of the timelessness of lust.[26] While love, rather than lust, is central to the overall meaning of the poem, here, Crane's treatment of lust anticipates its association with darkness in other poems.[27] Crane acknowledges the importance of lust with 'dark confessions' which prepare for the sexually explicit 'black swollen gates' in 'Voyages III.' Passion confuses the poet's relationship with the sea as his desire gradually overcomes his awe. The poet begins his seduction with the command to 'Take this sea'; although the line suggests the marriage ceremony, it is also a command to 'use' sexually. He also tries to persuade the sea to accept him by portraying his hands, which are folded in prayer-like obeisance, as offering 'the pieties of lovers' hands.' These ambiguities help suggest the poet's uncertainty about his quest.

Crane's hands are supplicant too, they symbolize his awe of the sea, apparent in his description of its austere 'sceptred terror,' for Crane knows that mythology depicts the Muse as resentful of those who would vie with her. The same sovereignty is suggested by the capitalization of 'Sea,' 'samite sheeted' surface and stately 'processioned' movement, although these

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[25] Ankey Larabee, 'The Symbol of the Sea in Crane's 'Voyages,'" Accent 3 (1943) 117-119. 1

[26] Larabee 118.

[27] Especially in 'The Dance,' with 'black drums thrusting on,' and 'Siphoned the black pool from the heart's hot root.'

descriptions hint at funereal winding sheets for the dead of 'At Melville's Tomb' too. In the first poem, Crane silently orders the children to 'Frisk with your dog,' 'Fondle your shells and sticks,' 'You must not cross' and 'nor ever trust beyond it.' In the second poem, the poet commands himself to 'Take this Sea,' 'Salute the crocus lustres of the stars,' 'Complete the dark confessions her veins spell,' 'Mark how her turning shoulders wind the hours,' 'And hasten,' and 'Hasten, while they are true.' By addressing himself as 'O my Prodigal,' Crane accepts his self-assigned task of completing 'the dark confessions her veins spell.' Crane knows his muse is indifferent, despite the sailors' entreaties for salvation, 'her turning shoulders' continue to 'wind the hours,' like the fates. If he throws himself upon the sea, it must be willingly, his desire must be greater than his fear. This is the only way that the poet can influence the sea's decision to accept or reject him; the stern sea signals who lives or dies for 'her demeanors motion well or ill.'

There is a sense of urgency, suggested by 'Hasten' and the *carpe diem* implications of 'while they are true—sleep, death, desire, / Close round one instant in one floating flower.' The normal order of 'desire', 'death' in its Elizabethan sense, and 'sleep' is reversed to become 'Sleep, death, desire' which describes death by drowning. This supports Fowlie's argument about death and copulation, but the sixth line of 'At Melville's Tomb' makes death a creative act when 'The calyx of death's bounty' gives back 'A scattered chapter.' The reference is to Moby Dick's lone survivor, Ishmael, as he is ejected from the vortex:

> So, floating on the margin of the ensuing scene, and in full sight of it, when the half-spent suction of the sunk ship reached me, I was then, but slowly, drawn towards the closing vortex. When I reached it, it had subsided to a creamy pool. Round and round, then, and ever contracting towards the button-like black bubble at the axis of that slowly wheeling circle, like another Ixion I did revolve. Till, gaining that vital centre, the black bubble upward burst; and now, liberated by reason of its cunning spring, and, owing to its great buoyancy, rising with great force, the coffin life-buoy shot length-wise from the sea, fell over, and floated by my side.[28]

The poem takes place at night, against a background of stars and phosphorescence which Crane apostrophizes in 'O minstrel galleons of Carib fire.' As he waits to enter the sea, the poet makes an invocation; he prays 'Bind us in time, O Seasons clear, and awe.' He asks the stars not to guide his ship to land until he has found his vision: 'Bequeath us no earthly shore until / Is answered in the vortex of our grave / The seal's wide spindrift gaze toward paradise.' The use of 'us' and 'our' implicates Crane, the lover and the sea. The quest for love, signalled by 'And onward—,' will be the poet's search for poetic affirmation; he too, will lift his eyes, 'frosted' with salt and spray and 'spindrift', and raise an altar to Crane's ultimate symbol, the 'imaged Word.' We are constantly reminded that this is a poem about poetry by the many references to the written word which emphasize its importance. 'On scrolls of

[28] Melville 536.

silver snowy sentences' and 'Complete the dark confessions her veins spell' are examples of this; from them, Crane makes a poetic construction on both literal and metaphysical levels.

'Voyages III'

In 'Voyages II,' the sea was separate from Crane; in 'Voyages III,' poet and sea merge as if each is 'beloved' by the other. This poem starts with an analogy: 'Infinite consanguinity it bears—,' to emphasize that the sea is the origin of life. By returning to the sea, the poet seeks renewal. The poet, represented by 'light,' is accepted by the sea, in contrast to 'Voyages I,' where the light reflects off the sea onto the 'brilliant kids.' As the poet is taken by the sea, he sinks under its waves 'where the sky / Resigns a breast that every wave enthrones.' For Smith, 'the image of the sky resting its breast upon the sea begins an analogy between the physical action of sexual union and the motions of the sea that will be further developed throughout "Voyages" III and IV.'[29] Crane's emphasis on physicality acts as a prelude to the imaginative world. Sinking beneath the 'samite sheeted surface,' the poet becomes part of the sea, recalling Arthur Rimbaud's 'Le Bateau ivre.'[30] The young Rimbaud's journey takes place on two planes; the sea voyage where he is the boat ('Plus léger qu'un bouchon j'ai dansé sur les flots' / 'Lighter than a cork I danced on the waves'),[31] and the journey into manhood. Robert Greer Cohn understands that the boat:

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[29] Smith 118.

[30] Rimbaud, CP.

[31] Line 14, Rimbaud, CP.

> stands (or, rather lies) for the boy-poet himself, on the threshold of a special manhood—prefiguring the departing vessel of 'Adieu'—timorously launching into the sea of independence, adult human life or, more deeply, the unknown force of the whole cosmos (including predominantly the feminine waters of birth and mother-nature or life *qua* experience).[32]

Here, Crane's quest follows a similar pattern as he becomes part of the sea and time is stilled:

> While ribboned water lanes I wind
> Are laved and scattered with no stroke
> Wide from your side, whereto this hour
> The sea lifts, also, reliquary hands. (V-3, 5-8)

'This tendered theme of you' puns on 'tender' to emphasize that the sea accepts the poet's bargain with her, but the sea can only lift 'reliquary hands', recalling those of the dead sailors, in reply to the offered 'pieties of lovers' hands.'

Crane anticipates consummation with 'And so.' There is no dash to separate; only a comma halts briefly the poet's journey through 'black swollen gates.' Thomas Yingling, referring to 'And so, admitted through black swollen gates / That must arrive all distance otherwise,' argues that 'this threshold

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[32] Robert Greer Cohn, The Poetry of Rimbaud (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1973)156-157.

image, surely subterranean and supernatural, an anal rather than a vaginal harbor for masculine desire, turns the lover's body into a cosmos.'[33] Eric Ormsby disagrees that that there is 'some submerged homoerotic "code"' in Crane's poetry or that 'Voyages' should 'fall under this narrow, sexually determined rubric':

> Without doubt these passages allude, among other things, to Crane's actual lovemaking with Emil Opffer, and Yingling is right to bring in Crane's ecstatic letter about Opffer in which he wrote of 'flesh transformed by intensity of response to counterresponse.' But surely this cannot be the whole point of the passage. Crane was too consummate an artist to have blurred so central an epiphany, especially when it concerned the deepest love of his life. To state this does not (*pace* Yingling) make one a 'homophobe' but a responsible, as opposed to a duplicitous, reader of a text. In truth, the 'Voyages' are not really about sex at all, but about love and love's transformative energies, what Crane called the 'silken skilled transmemberment of song.'[34]

Ormsby's point about renewal is apt. Death and rebirth intermingle as the poet reaches his spiritual destination aided by the metaphors of gates, pillars

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[33] Quoted in Eric Ormsby, 'The Last Elizabethan: Hart Crane at 100, The New Criterion 19. 6 (2001), 6. July 2003 http://www.newcriterion.com/archive/19/feb01/crane.htm. 7.

[34] Ormsby 7-8

and pediments signposting heaven. At the same time, these metaphors prepare for the poet's rebirth through 'transmemberment': 'And so, admitted through black swollen gates / That must arrest all distance otherwise,' perhaps influenced by 'I Sing the Body Electric' in which Whitman suggests that the body is the entrance to the soul:

> This is the nucleus—after the child is born of woman, man is
> of woman,
> This is the bath of birth, this the merge of small and large,
> and the outlet again.
>
> Be not ashamed woman, your privilege encloses the rest,
> And is the exit of the rest,
> You are the gates of your body, and you are the gates of the
> soul.[35]

While Whitman's influence might also support a 'homosexual' reading, the poet's words demonstrate a longing for renewal. The sexual imagery is part of this powerful urge as the poet is assimilated and sensations explode within the poem:

> Light wrestling there incessantly with light,

[35]Walt Whitman, The Complete Poems ed. Francis Murphy (London: Penguin, 1996). Hereafter Whitman, CP.

Star kissing star through wave on wave unto

Your body rocking! (V-3, 12-14)

The repeated image of light underscores Crane's epiphany but the carnal rapture, conveyed by the poem's erotic images, is spent. The line splits, then begins again halfway into the next line, to confirm that Crane has passed through the gate of consciousness to a renewal: '...and where death, if shed, / Presumes no carnage.' Death by drowning does not bring 'carnage' but transformation, designated as 'this single change.' Poetry, the 'silken skilled transmemberment of song,' has given the poet the chance to be born again, metaphorically. Beguiled and enthralled, the poet asks the sea to celebrate his offering in a seemingly concluding line set off from the rest of the poem: 'Permit me voyage, love, into your hands...' However, the ellipses imply that the line will be continued. On the literal level, the poet has given up himself willingly. On the metaphysical level, Crane has briefly created his ecstatic moment and though it must fade immediately, he has been inspired.

'Voyages IV'

The last line syntactically continues in 'Voyages IV.' This poem acts as a turning point; the poet metaphorically re-enters the world in verses of long sentences that imitate the lengthy journey back to life. Crane again uses the device of running on to connect the events of 'Voyages III' with his reactions in 'Voyages IV'. The 'whose' of the first stanza refers back to 'your hands' in 'Voyages III' to imply that time has reasserted its order. The poet has moved on beyond his physical experience and now, satisfied and replete, he reflects

on the sea Muse. While 'counted smile of hours and days' reflects his happiness, the phrase also warns of the inexorable passage of time, as does the 'widening noon.' Transformed by his experience, Crane understands that the normal order is returning but he is confident that his 'claim' upon the sea can be reasserted 'in this hour / And region that is ours to wreathe again.' 'No stream of greater love' recalls the words of Jesus Christ: 'Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.'[36] The allusion suggests that Crane lays down his life to prove his love, which he offers wholeheartedly. In words that echo Walt Whitman, the poet, the son of Adam, gives thanks that this love extends beyond his human span:

> No stream of greater love advancing now
> Than singing this mortality alone
> Through clay aflow immortally to you. (V-4, 6-8)

The poet 'must first be lost in fatal tides to tell' if he is to repeat his submission. The erotic voyage is over. Crane emphasizes its ending with his pun on 'portending eyes.'

The sea no longer taunts or acknowledges the poet; the merging of sea and lover in 'Blue latitudes and levels of your eyes' confirms her conquest. Despite this, Crane's fears re-surface. He has no certainties, only the 'bright insinuations that my years have caught.' The poet's fourth poem, like the second and third, ends with an invocation; this one suggests that the poet or 'expectant' will be left wanting to 'still exclaim receive / The secret oar and

[36] St. John 15: 13.

petals of all love.' 'Oar' recalls Ishmael's near drowning and 'petals' recall the 'calyx of death's bounty giving back / A scattered chapter,' so while the imagery remains sexual, the memory of death begins to re-invade the poem. Poetically, Crane is weighted down by his knowledge that he will have to undergo again this ceremony of sacrifice for inspiration:

> Shall they not stem and close in our own steps
> Bright staves of flowers and quills today as I
> Must first be lost in fatal tides to tell? (V-4, 14-16)

This weight is evidenced by the unpunctuated sentences which gradually turn the mood of the poem from celebratory 'singing' to one of parting. The poet embodies his 'word' but the lack of capitalization betrays the unfinished quest for the 'incarnate word' is not the 'imaged Word.' Crane needs to find his grail beyond the sexual experience in 'Voyages III.' The poet moves on by withdrawing from his contract with the sea:

> In signature of the incarnate word
> The harbor shoulders to resign in mingling
> Mutual blood (V-4, 17-19)

The bartered exchange of 'Mutual blood' is complete, it no longer protects the poet who resumes his quest. The pattern of the ecstatic moment fading immediately, leaving the poet anxious to recreate it, remains true.

'Voyages V'

Crane effects his symbolic banishment in 'Voyages V' with language that cuts and shatters; images that are 'too brittle or too clear to touch' are severed by

'one merciless white blade.' He simulates abandonment by suggesting that the sea rejects the poet, who is left adrift. The 'June' of life has passed; it is now 'past Midnight.' Crane assesses his predicament in punning language that amalgamates the fate of the lover with that of the poet:

> Meticulous, past midnight in clear rime,
> Infrangible and lonely, smooth as though cast
> Together in one merciless white blade— (V-5, 1-3)

'Clear rime' is ironic, there is none. The 'secret oar' of love has become 'one merciless white blade.' Until this poem, Crane's submersion in the sea is described in language that mimics the rolling waves; 'penniless rich palms / Pass superscription,' 'Star kissing star through wave on wave,' 'fragrance irrefragably,' and the way in which 'port' becomes 'portion' in 'Voyages IV' promotes the effect. Harsh divisions now replace this flowing motion to emphasize dislocation; 'The bay estuaries fleck the hard sky limits' suggests division and aggression. The scene is forbidding; both physically and emotionally, like the landscape of 'North Labrador,' it has become 'A land of leaning ice' which 'Flings itself silently / Into eternity.' [37] Crane associates ice with poetic sterility:

> Cold-hushed, there is only the shifting of moments
> That journey towards no Spring—
> No birth, no death , no time nor sun
> In answer. (NL, 9-12)

[37] According to Marc Simon, 'North Labrador' was composed circa September 1917.

The language of 'North Labrador' recalls that of Wallace Stevens in 'The Snow Man' where 'the listener, who listens in the snow, / And nothing himself beholds / Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is.'[38] Crane's language too, becomes almost nihilistic: 'Where nothing turns but dead sands flashing.'

Rejected by the sea, Crane, like the drowning sailors, gazes upwards but instead of heaven, he sees their, and his history in 'The cables of our sleep so swiftly filed, / Already hang.' Death, like the poet's imagined concord with the sea, is over quickly, in one 'instant.' Along with 'shred ends from remembered stars,' which mock the poet's memory of 'Star kissing star,' the poet sees the moon's 'frozen trackless smile' which mocks his aspirations. Larabee calls the sea 'the cradle of forgetfulness'[39] but it is memory which makes the poet so unhappy, the one moment has passed and cannot be re-captured. The scenery of the poem is redefined by the poet's rejection; the sea is no longer boundless but hemmed in by the bay estuaries. Song is silent, for the moon will not listen to the impotent poet who entreats 'What words can strangle this deaf moonlight?' The poet is overwhelmed by despair and cries out his loss in the broken sentence between the second and third stanzas: 'For we / Are overtaken.'

The sea continues to roll, controlled only by the moon for 'Now no cry, no sword / Can fasten or deflect this tidal wedge.' Even moonlight, a traditional poetic symbol, lets down the poet for it is 'moonlight loved / And changed.' Hazo understands this movement as one in which the poet vainly seeks to reconcile the world of love with the world of time.[40] This explanation

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[38] Wallace Stevens, The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens (London: Faber, 1955). Hereafter Stevens, CP.

[39] Larabee 119.

[40] Hazo 64.

does not take into account the necessity of failure to propel the poet towards his ultimate goal, that of discovering the 'imaged Word.' Failure is described poetically; 'clear rime' precedes lines which do not rhyme, 'no cry, no sword,' intimates that the poet cannot write while words, when they come, are the moon's and are used to mock the poet: '"There's / Nothing like this in the world."' 'No cry, no sword' recalls 'No worst, there is none' by Gerard Manley Hopkins which enacts a test of faith.[41] Crane's bitter response to this is an ironic reaction to the careless 'Nothing':

> Knowing I cannot touch your hand and look
> Too, into that godless cleft of sky
> Where nothing turns but dead sands flashing. (V-5, 15-17)

Drawing on the galleon motif of 'Voyages II', the sea and moon merge into the poet's cry of despair: 'In all the argosy of your bright hair I dreamed / Nothing so flagless as this piracy.' The promise, signalled by 'bright hair', has proved illusory to the betrayed poet.

Crane's hopes are dashed by an icy enlightenment which exposes his unsubstantiated hope for the voyage: '—And never to quite understand!' The moon, seen through the newly discerning eyes of the poet begins to wane as it too appears to sink into the sea:

> But now
> Draw in your head, alone and too tall here.
> Your eyes already in the slant of drifting foam;
> Your breath sealed by the ghosts I do not know:
> Draw in your head and sleep the long way home. (V-5, 21-25)

[41] Hopkins, PW.

The poet feels he has failed. The answer sought in the 'seal's wide spindrift gaze toward paradise' is denied to him; instead it is the moon whose 'eyes already in the slant of drifting foam' keep pact with the sea. Crane is forced to accept h is exclusion as the moon is banished by day. These images of departure prepare for the ending of the poem, forcing the poet to bid his hope goodbye and prepare, like the moon, to 'sleep the long way home.' The poem, like Crane, waits for a solution.

'Voyages VI'

In the last section, the poet reflects on his quest. Emotionally he is broken, but authorially, he needs to guide the protagonist from despair to consolation. The maudlin throb of 'Steadily as a shell secretes / Its beating leagues of monotone,' echoes Crane's dismay over his inability to retain his 'moment.' This beat is matched by a rhyme scheme which, apart from the abab of the first stanza, is regulated by second and fourth line rhymes. The sea, ironically referenced as 'icy and bright dungeons,' has rejected the poet, but the poet's words continue to betray his love for it. By describing himself as Tiresias, 'Thy derelict and blinded guest,' we know that Crane is still in thrall to the sea. To explain his defeat, and wrest some triumph from his downfall, the poet aggrandizes the power of the sea. He does so in the language of Shakespeare: 'Let thy waves rear / More savage than the death of kings.' In Richard II, the King declares: 'For god's sake, let us sit upon the ground, / And tell sad stories of the death of kings.'[42] He has in mind deaths of violence. Crane's reference implies that the sea is more powerful than any human agency and that defeat is inevitable. Forced to accept that he cannot 'win' the sea, the poet's unitive solution begins with his use of rivers.

[42] Richard II 3. 2. 151-2.

Crane's rivers are symbols of change because they 'churning, shift / Green borders under stranger skies.' They are also symbols of connection for they merge with the sea; 'O rivers mingling towards the sky' echoes 'mingling / Mutual blood' of the last poem so that language and the effect of gathering in the skeins is emphasized. Rivers feed the harbor which, lit by the rising sun's 'Red kelson,' becomes 'the phoenix' breast' which symbolizes regeneration. This 'red kelson' recalls Helen's 'deep blush' in 'For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen'; the image will reappear in line 13 of 'Ave Maria' as 'the sun's red caravel.' Crane has been purified by his baptism in the sea, he, too, is 'waiting afire' for rebirth.

Renewal is based upon the concept of 'Beyond.' Here, the solution lies beyond the imagined end of Crane's quest, described by Crane as 'Beyond siroccos harvesting.' The poet emphasizes that he is ending the poem by reworking imagery from 'Voyages I.' There, 'waves fold thunder on the sand,' here 'Belle Isle' is 'Unfolded' while 'The solstice thunders.' The tense changes from present to past tense; 'The solstace thunders, crept away / Like a cliff swinging or a sail / Flung into April's inmost day.' This change of tense divides the journey from the poem's visionary finale which is almost reached. April, according to T. S. Eliot, in 'The Burial of the Dead':

> is the cruellest month, breeding
> Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
> Memory and desire.[43]

Crane too, has mixed 'memory and desire' to breed 'Creation's blithe and petalled word.' This 'word' is an offering rather than a grail for its first letter is in lower case. It is offered up to 'lounged goddess' of the imagination whom,

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[43] Eliot, CP.

in this poem, Crane associates with dawn. 'When she rose' suggests sunrise in movement and colour and recalls Homer's rosy-fingered goddess, who 'comes early, with rosy fingers.'[44] Because her eyes 'smile unsearchable repose—' we know that she represents journey's end, an effect heightened by Crane's dash. The goddess does not speak but her eyes promise a new beginning as they 'concede dialogue' and give words back to the poet. The poet's contract, his 'fervid covenant' is rewarded by vision.

'Belle Isle,' Crane's 'floating dais' is his 'Atlantis.'[45] The poet becomes rhapsodic as former images are amended; the deceiving 'bright hair' of 'Voyages IV' becomes rainbows that 'twine continual hair.' 'White echo of the oar' corrects 'one merciless white blade'; flowers and oar have been incorporated in their proper place. 'Belle Isle' is an altar for the 'imaged Word.' 'Word' is capitalized to show its realized potential while 'it is,' repeated in the third line to emphasize Crane's belief that 'It is the unbetrayable reply,' proves the poet's belief that his 'Word' will never betray him or desert him completely. Crane's invocation to the Muse: 'Bind us in time, O seasons clear' is answered by 'Creation's blithe and petalled word.' Crane is renewed through his acceptance and his vision reintegrated:

> It is the unbetrayable reply
> Whose accent no farewell can know. (V-6, 31-32)

The rhetorical power of these lines sweeps the poem to a positive conclusion yet the twofold effect of 'no' and 'know' suggests a double negative that will cancel out Crane's triumph.

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[44] Homer, The Odyssey, trans. Walter Shewring (Oxford, NY: Oxford UP, 1980).

[45] The legendary 'lost Atlantis' is a mythical island that sank beneath the Atlantic Ocean.

The question asked in 'North Labrador' can still be asked of the sea at the end of 'Voyages': 'Has no one come here to win you, / Or left you with the faintest blush / Upon your glittering breasts?' The theme of love sought, love gained, love lost is so familiar that Crane cannot change the outcome only re-interpret it in other poems. Crane describes his 'Word' as holding 'Hushed willows in its glow.' This image is later expanded to become 'Repose of Rivers.'[46] There, 'The willows carried a slow sound.' The theme of 'Voyages' also appears; although 'Repose of Rivers' tells of a journey from the river's point of view rather than the poet's, both travel towards a 'beyond' that, whether it is 'Beyond siroccos' or 'beyond the dykes,' epitomizes an idealized destination. Both include 'bartering' and a 'black gorge.' 'How much I would have bartered! The black gorge / And all the singular nestings in the hills' is the river's translation of 'black swollen gates' and Crane's 'fervid covenant' in 'Voyages.' The poet's immersion in 'Voyages' is paralleled by:

> The pond I entered once and quickly fled—
> I remember now its singing willow rim. (RR, 15-16)

'The act of imagination, which is the poem, becomes a bridge to a new state of consciousness, a unitive state to which the reader implicitly assents,' according to Sugg.[47] The vision lies within the challenge to 'Complete the dark confessions.' It is the struggle rather than a solution which proves productive.

[46] According to Simon, composed circa early 1926; first published September 1926.

[47] Sugg 6.

Chapter 3

Introduction to The Bridge

'Terrific threshold of the prophet's pledge' (TBB, 31)

Crane's famous long poem, The Bridge, continues the tendencies that are evident in 'For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen.'[1] The poem aroused conflicting reactions from the start, summed up by Allen Tate who called The Bridge a magnificent failure although he acknowledged the poem's greatness.[2] Ezra Greenspan puts criticism of the time into context: 'Two reviews of The Bridge, by Allen Tate and Yvor Winters, did as much to affect Crane's thinking about himself, as they did to influence the early reception of the poem. They were gifted critics, still in the process of defining their temperaments. Different as they were—Tate a devoted modernist, Winters a rational antimodernist—they came to nearly the same conclusion. They read The Bridge as an epic in the tradition of Whitman that exposed the failure of the tradition itself.'[3]

Placing it at the end of a tradition of Romanticism, Tate criticized the bridge as being too static a symbol as well as claiming that such a bridge is unsuccessful as a unifying symbol because it does not sustain a cohering link.

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[1] LHC 119-120.

[2] Tate.

[3] Ezra Greenspan, ed., The Cambridge Companion to Walt Whitman (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995).

These criticisms perhaps reveal more about Tate's perceptions than Crane's poem. As Bloom writes in his forward to Complete Poems of Hart Crane, 'Unity, whether in a long poem or short, is largely a function of the reader's perspective.'[4] The poem relies on what Michael Roberts, discussing The Waste Land, describes as 'imaginative order':

> This 'imaginative order' is not something arbitrary, specific and inexplicable. If the images which are used to denote complex situations were replaced by abstractions, much of the apparent incoherence of the poem would vanish. It would become a prose description of the condition of the world, a restatement of a myth and a defence of the tragic view of life. But being a poem it does more than this; a poem expresses not merely the idea of a social or scientific fact, but also the sensation of thinking or knowing, and it does not merely defend the tragic view, it may communicate it.[5]

The design of The Bridge, that of the final section written before the preceding pieces, implies that this is a poem to scale imaginatively across the world rather than record a history chronologically. Crane's longer poems all struggle to define something, while acknowledging that there is no all-encompassing

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[4] Harold Bloom, introduction, The Complete Poems of Hart Crane, ed. Marc Simon (New York: Liveright, 2000).

[5] Michael Roberts, ed., The Faber Book of Modern Verse, 3rd ed. (1936; London: Faber, 1965) 15.

answer. This desire runs throughout the longer poems, adding an air of courage to the quests which always end on what Giles calls 'a permanent question mark.'[6] The question mark that Giles detects lies within the suggestion that any resolution is necessarily temporary. Bloom, describing the last stanzas of 'To Brooklyn Bridge,' argues: 'the poet remains present, but only as a knowing abyss, contemplating the content of that knowing, which is a fullness or presence he can invoke but scarcely share.'[7]

Paul Giles believes that 'the unity of Crane's The Bridge, both in philosophical terms and in terms of literary form, derives from this tendency to create affinities between apparently disparate objects'[8]:

> Thus, as so many critics have noticed, the smaller units of the poem involve a series of bridgings which are synecdoches mirroring the larger design of the poem as a Bridge.[9]

Sidney Richman believes that The Bridge '"lends" no "myth to God." If anything, it lends a myth to our own Godlessness.'[10] Richman's argument is based upon his belief that 'the poem is not alone dedicated to the creation of a myth, nor even to a transcendental re-investment of religious spirit into the industrial world.' Instead, he proposes:

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[6] Giles 198.

[7] Bloom, Agon 262.

[8] Echoing Eliot's point about 'disparate objects' in Selected Essays.

[9] Giles 7.

[10] Sidney Richman, 'Hart Crane's "Voyages II": An Experiment in Redemption,' Wisconson Studies in Contemporary Literature 3 (1962): 65-78.

> It is also devoted, in fact primarily devoted, to what Waldo Frank has called the Whitmanesque theme of 'man's transfiguration.' Altogether it is a much more ambitious task than the purely mythic. For essential to such a goal, as the case of Whitman or Baudelaire demonstrates, is the necessity for creating a *new sensibility*, a new mode of apprehending reality. [11]

The Bridge is a magnificent poem about a quest that must fail; despite recognizing that poetic vision cannot transform the world, the poem bravely proposes that it should try.

The poem takes the form of an imaginative quest through past and present America, with the poet-protagonist trying out the identities of his characters so that he can 'know' their experiences. The device of enacting an imaginative journey allows Crane to range through history as well as over the land, always interpreting the vista from his own viewpoint. Uroff makes this point about the poem's form:

> The theme of voyage and flight is age-old in literature, and Crane's use of it is an extension of the Romantic conception of the voyage as a willful projection of feeling. But, like Whitman before him, Crane's is a symbolistic voyage, concerned less with the exploration of emotion than with exploration as a means of existence.[12]

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[11] Richman 66.

[12] Uroff 115.

Uroff rightly identifies both Romantic and Symbolist factors in Crane's poems but not the poet's aspirations. Crane hoped that The Bridge would become 'a symbol of consciousness, knowledge, spiritual unity.'[13] The poetry both celebrates and betrays a knowledge that this aspiration is doomed to failure. Giles understands this failure as a form of self-parody:

> ...while the bridge sometimes seems to be reunifying the fragments of a fallen world, at other times it appears more like a self-parodic exercise, a confession of the arbitrary and ultimately invalid nature of all belief.[14]

That the poet recognizes this is evident in the raising and dashing of hope. This movement mirrors the poet's aspirations and fears, and makes the poems appear intensely personal. The poet's quarry is never named directly, nor is his goal defined, yet the hope that Crane can imaginatively redeem the modern void is suggested by the very imperfections of the world that he presents. Giles places the poem within an American tradition, arguing 'While reflecting the social conditions of capitalist America, The Bridge is also in the millennial tradition of American long poems which anticipate a final triumph, a better future; and in the case of The Bridge this vision is actually concealed within the words on the page themselves.'[15] Roy Pearce, in The Continuity of American Poetry, also detects this hope: 'The Bridge was Crane's attempt to

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[13] LHC 241.

[14] Giles 18.

[15] Giles 207.

assure himself that he was not suffering from a delusion, that the poet did not have to whimper, that past, present, and future were one; that America would again be "worthy to be spoken of" as soon as the proper words could be found. In the right words, if only the poet could discover them, lay not only the means of poetry but its end.'[16] The poems are an imaginative record of both Crane's arrival at this conviction and his fears that his conviction might not be true.

To prove the need for an imaginative catharsis, Crane draws on the stultifying city life of 'For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen' and remakes it into the contemporary city life of The Bridge. The epigraph intimates that the contemporary city is Satan's territory. It is a 'valley of ashes,' peopled by characters akin to those of Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby[17]. Giles believes that Crane 'saw himself as a mythopoeic hero who could transmute the base metal of America's industrial world into gold.'[18] Despite Crane's desire to transform reality for his contemporaries, the possessive pronouns seem rhetorical. The poems constantly reveal a figure separate from the multitude; where his peers see only the curve of the sales-figures graph on the page, he sees the visionary sails of quest which 'with inviolate curve, forsake our eyes / As apparitional as sails that cross / Some page of figures to be filed away.' R. W. B. Lewis puts it thus: 'While his major symbol, the bridge, might represent for *him* several kinds of ideal union, to the American mind at large it signified only a faster path to a faster dollar. And the present

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[16] Pearce 102.

[17] Scott F. Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969) 29.

[18] Giles 208.

age, far from continuing and re-animating the great visions of the past, was a dismal degradation of the past; America's spiritual destiny lay buried in the vanished age of Whitman.'[19]

Lewis's comment summarizes Crane's perception of a spiritual waste land and explains why Crane seeks a solution from the past rather than the present as if the poet's writing is as much a reaction against, rather than a response to, the present. Crane recognized the pull of the past, explaining its importance in his letters: 'The form of my poem rises out of a past that so overwhelms the present with its worth and vision that I'm at a loss to explain my delusion that there exist any real links between that past and a future destiny worthy of it.'[20] To remind his readers of such worth and vision, Crane constantly refers to the past which Revell believes is a method of reclamation for the American poet:

> Having reclaimed one spiritual desert, he moved on to another and the totality of his work came to represent that section of human experience (his own or humanity's at large) redeemed from desolation. The significance of certain stages of the journey might appear only in retrospect, and the final resolution, the full view of the land regained, acquired dimension from the smaller gains of the journey.[21]

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[19] Lewis 228.

[20] LHC 261.

[21] Peter Revell, Quest in Modern American Poetry (London: Vision P, 1981) 25.

Revell successfully describes Crane's method of accruing piecemeal experience. Crane believed that the individual sections were 'in relation to the other parts, *in series*, of the major design of the entire poem. Each is a separate canvas, as it were, yet none yields its entire significance when seen apart from the others.'[22] Returning to Revell's statement, 'spiritual desert' seems an inappropriate description for a past imbued with 'worth and vision' in Crane's eyes although the phrase subconsciously discloses The Bridge, where the city, presented as a 'Waste Land' of the spirit, is a counter-response to Eliot's The Waste Land. That Crane's poem is a determined affirmation is argued by Gray who writes: 'He has transformed the *actual* bridge into an *ideal*, liberating symbol: uniting river and sea, land and sky in one revelatory 'myth', a single inviolate curve that leaps upward toward the absolute.' [23] 'Ideal' recognizes that the symbol is visionary as well as transformative while 'myth' also supports the implication that it is imaginative rather than 'absolute.' Pearce, echoing Uroff's statement that Crane is a symbolistic poet whose exploration is the means of existence, argues that 'myth' is 'simply [Crane's] word for that fecundative power of language' and ultimately that the '"myth" is, then, solipsistic—that of man the myth-maker who must feed upon the myth he makes.'[24] Giles also recognizes the mythic element and Crane's solipsism: 'Emotionally Crane loathed certain aspects of commercialism, but intellectually he was obliged to recognize that a heroic

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[22] LHC 305.

[23] Richard Gray, American Poetry of the Twentieth Century (London: Longman, 1990) 208-209.

[24] Pearce 109.

Saviour must move among His fallen people; and so, solipsist that he was, Crane set himself the task of mythologizing and thus "redeeming" the world he inhabited.'[25]

Crane does create his own myth in The Bridge but one of the poet's strengths is the way that he bestows life upon his poems by effect. The reader is led to believe that the poem has acquired a life of its own, separate from the poet's control, by the way in which Crane implies that he is led through the quest as if the myth has run away from him. This method serves to highlight the poem as an individual journey, with Crane's anxieties about its purpose surfacing at many points, yet the hope that the poet's bridge might connect the physical nature of man to his spiritual, imaginative side is repeatedly stressed so that the reader will absorb this perception as the rationale for the poem. Crane's journey will be an affirmation because of, rather than despite, his doubts. Ultimately, however, the past is the authorial pathway of Crane's internalized quest, a view borne out by Gelpi who suggests that American poets are 'challenged by their culture and so driven more deeply than others into the erotic and instinctual resources of the individual psyche.'[26]

Gelpi's comment raises questions about the importance of nationality for American poets and the associations of exploration and pushing back frontiers. The Bridge's recurring image of the eagle is itself an American emblem. The quest is a concept that extends far beyond the idea of a

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[25] Giles 208.

[26] Albert Gelpi, The Tenth Muse: The Psyche of the American Poet (London, Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1975) xii.

particular continent, but Crane emphasizes his understanding of his own American nature through many references to other American writers; for example, he juxtaposes his own quest and that of Walt Whitman's. Hazo makes the valid point that Crane's Bridge 'is a vision of America unique to one man. Crane's America has significance in The Bridge as *a part* of his vision and not as something *apart* from it.'[27]

Alvarez believes that Crane's 'Americanism was a central part of his genius: greatness was not. In this way he is like Scott Fitzgerald: he responded so fully to his time that he could never go beyond its limitations.'[28] Alvarez seems to be inversely paraphrasing Eliot's essay, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' in which Eliot declares the importance of the past to the poet:

> This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his contemporaneity.[29]

Alvarez limits Crane's talent to a response to the poet's time yet 'Americanism' is simply one part of the tradition of a poet influenced by European poets such as Donne and Rimbaud as well as Whitman and Poe.

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[27] Hazo 69.

[28] Alvarez 109.

[29] T.S. Eliot, The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism (London: Methuen, 1932) 49.

The criticism of not going beyond his time is negated by the poet's attempt to transform his time. He describes America because it is a known geography, which allows Crane to chase the phantoms of the past in the wake of the early explorers and pioneers. However, this earlier desire to seek out the new and unknown in America is translated into a wider contemporary spiritual quest. Gray suggests:

> It is the old problem of the American Dream the poet poses, in a series of eight poems that follow the westward thrust of the bridge into the body of the continent. The movement is one in time as well as space; and as Crane moves across the continent he continually presents the reader with the same question. How, he asks, can the ideal possibilities of people be liberated so as to recover the kingdom of heaven on earth? How can an arc or bridge be constructed between the world in which we live and the world of the imagination, so that the life of the individual may assume a fresh nobility and the forms of the community approximate to the divine? [30]

Gray rightly captures these questions as being at the heart of the poem but he underestimates their deliberately rhetorical nature. Crane poses his questions in the knowledge that they are unanswerable; they are an act of religion, an act equivalent to 'Frosted eyes there were that lifted altars.' To the poet, this concept was evident: 'The very idea of a bridge, of course, is a form peculiarly

[30] Gray 208.

dependent on such spiritual convictions. It is an act of faith besides being a communication.'[31] Crane's quest, to transform the present through knowledge of a past presented as both idyllic and courageous, must fail for even this past is a Cranian creation. The poem cannot discover the answers to its own unanswerable questions; its heroic purpose, in seeking to know the unknowable, is to make the attempt the redemptive act.

Between 'Proem' and 'Cutty Sark,' Crane's quest takes him on a journey that crosses both temporal and physical barriers. A recreated past, loosely based on history, myth and legend, plays like a silent film against the contemporary foreground from which Crane operates, echoing the first two lines of 'Legend': 'As silently as a mirror is believed / Realities plunge in silence by...' Combs is also aware of this transparent imagery:

> We might say that the mind of the narrator presented in these lyrics is like a great movie screen on which all tableaux possible in his culture can be seen and eventually seen through.[32]

Combs implies that 'reality' is superimposed upon the poet but Crane's imagination is imposed upon these 'realities' to create a temporary 'present,' even when the characters who walk through the poems represent America's infancy. Columbus and Pocahontas make the poem appear historically based, Whitman and Poe are looked to for guidance, while Irving's Van Winkle is an integral part of American literary consciousness. To aid the

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[31] LHC 261.

[32] Combs 112.

sense of connection, the male characters appear in different forms but share the same desires, while Pocahontas, the earth symbol, represents all of the female roles. All of the male characters exist within situations in which they are tested, either at night or in shadow. Columbus is almost prevented from returning home by the sea, a traditionally female symbol. His prayers to Mary are unanswered; instead he is 'saved' by the rising of the sun which 'dissuades the abyss' and reaffirms his faith. His line degenerates into the Larry of 'Indiana' who becomes the drunken sailor of 'Cutty Sark.' 'Van Winkle' symbolizes those who struggle with life, in the poems that follow, his inheritors, the hoboes, do not fulfill their potential and they, in turn, are represented by the dead husband in 'Indiana' who does not find a fortune in the goldfields. These characters are not total failures; perhaps failure is never total for Hart Crane as he searches for promise rather than failure in the line 'Though they touch something like a key perhaps.' The poet 'tries out' these roles, absorbing their experience to guide the poem's direction. The downward direction of these characters, supported by the language of the poems, demonstrates the need for an 'imaginative' uplift. It is the justification for The Bridge.

A quest must start from a defined point; Crane begins his from both the literal and symbolic structure of Brooklyn Bridge. Schlauch describes Crane's method in The Bridge as one of movement: 'His [Crane's] poem on Brooklyn Bridge in New York City shifts back and forth repeatedly between a physical description and a series of abstract propositions suggested by it.' [33] Uroff reinterprets this movement as one of flight: 'But, more than that, flight is in

[33] Margaret Schlauch, Modern English and American Poetry (London: Watts, 1956) 36.

Crane's poetry a means of knowledge, an experience of totality.'[34] The importance of movement is rightly acknowledged by both critics, but although the poem depends on these 'abstract propositions' to provide the pathways for Crane's quest, Brooklyn Bridge's status as the 'godhead' remains the point from which all paths radiate outwards, and to which they eventually return. Without the real bridge to anchor the poem, the poet might not search for or explore further imaginative bridges. Crane's imaginative journey through time and space is launched from the bridge in his 'Proem,' makes its own bridges in the sections that follow, and it returns to Brooklyn Bridge in 'Atlantis.' In Paul's view the bridge and time are one and the same: 'The bridge is a curve of time, simultaneously past-present-future. It exists in the present as a vital presence of the past, and the future it portends will possess values—new only because rediscovered—that are associated with the past.'[35] Paul implies that the metaphorical bridge is not bound by time, yet Crane acknowledges that the imagination exists within the context of time by chronicling the contemporary world of Brooklyn Bridge from dawn to evening.

This cyclical nature is stressed by the 'Proem's' first line: 'How many dawns.' Crane's reluctance to begin his quest suggests his anxiety about it. The poet himself had doubts about the premise of his poem: 'Emotionally I should like to write The Bridge; intellectually judged the whole theme and project seem more and more absurd.'[36] Crane's words articulate his fears which are incorporated into the structure of the poems. Combs understands

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[34] Uroff 114.

[35] Paul 180.

[36] LHC 261.

this stance; the poet's solutions are always momentary and he must act as the 'bad-conscious of society'[37] with all the difficulties involved:

> Never before had thinkers found themselves in the paradoxical position of introducing value into a culture by destroying for themselves what had been considered the basis of value....In other words it became necessary for the Romantic alien to live in a meaningless world in order to make meaning real again for his readers.[38]

The poet, caught between problem and solution, transfers his feelings of isolation to the poem as he struggles to 'learn' the past. His desire to 'know' structures the poet's quest, the run-ons leading Crane onwards through the poem. Each section is structured by Crane's assumption of an identity and his learning of that character's experience. Every learned experience assists the poet to continue his journey.

1 'To Brooklyn Bridge'

The Bridge is a series of lyrics linked by transitional 'bridges' which often work by implication rather than statement. These poems function as links to the poems of White Buildings, or, in the case of 'To Brooklyn Bridge,' prepare for the poems within The Bridge. The introductory poem introduces the literal

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[37] Combs 27. Combs quotes from Nietzsche's Beyond Good and Evil, trans. Walter Kaufman (New York: Random House, 1966) 137.

[38] Combs 27.

bridge as a symbol of inspiration; it is the starting point for the poet's quest. The 'Proem' also introduces one of the major premises of the poem, that of the bridge as a symbol of connection. The Bridge is an acknowledgement of the need for a transformative symbol; the poet is aware that he must seek out the most effective way of using his symbol within the machine age. The ideal the bridge represents does not fade from the poem; in effect, it acts for the bridge when it disappears from the poem. Revell recognizes this symbolic nature: 'But though the bridge does not appear in its finite form in the central sections, it remains a symbolic value as the vaunting material expression of man's drive toward discovery, expressing the link between a past that was suffered and overcome, and a future that beckons with possibility.'[39]

Although only 'Proem: To Brooklyn Bridge,' 'Cutty Sark,' 'Cape Hatteras,' and 'Atlantis' refer to an actual bridge, the symbol of a metaphorical bridge is a constant presence throughout. While Revell captures the symbolism of the bridge, he reverses the symbolism of past and present. Revell reads the past as a time of suffering and the present as one of possibility, contradicting Crane's premise of an idealized past and valueless present awaiting transformation.

The poem starts with an epigraph from the 'Book of Job.' In the Bible, Lucifer's statement precedes the storytelling in Job; here it refers to experience. Sugg believes that the epigraph fulfils another function: 'by alluding to Job at the start of his poem, Crane implies that his epic of the

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[39] Peter Revell, "Voyage of Possibility: A Study of the Quest in modern American Poetry, with reference to selected poems by Conrad Aitken, Ezra Pound, Hart Crane, T. S. Eliot, H. D.and William Carlos Williams," diss., Cardiff U, 1973-74, 173.

imagination is a theodicy whose deity is as elusive, but as real, as the *deus absconditus* of the Old Testament story. Crane's deity, of course, is the imagination itself, and intrinsic rather than transcendental.'[40]

Outwardly Crane makes a god of his bridge rather than the imagination in The Bridge. Yet although it is the bridge which inspires him, his bridge is constructed by his interior imagination; if the metaphorical bridge is worthy of worship then the means of making it must be infinitely more so. The epigraph parallels this; if Satan knows the earth, then God, who created him, must be even more knowledgeable and powerful. Its purpose paves the way for the journey that the poet must make, but it also serves as a warning.

Throughout The Bridge, warning is balanced by the promise of renewal. The theme of renewal is universal to all cultures; within most religions and myths we see the desire for a type of 'rebirth.' Geoffrey Ashe describes the self-generative power of this desire:

> All the variants of the mystique are challenges to the same gloomy inevitability. They excite human beings because they affirm that what seems to be lost is not lost; that a golden age not only existed, but can be disinterred from corruption with heightened glory; that the effects of time can be blotted out by some radical act; that the encroaching evil can be thrown off, and even made functional in the rebirth of what is crushed.... [41]

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[40] Sugg 23.

[41] Geoffrey Ashe, Camelot and the Vision of Albion (London: Heinemann, 1975) 140.

Eliot also seems to look back at a 'golden literary age' but there are other explanations for this apart from the 'rebirth' theory. David Bromwich proposes that both Crane and Eliot reveal their motives through allusion:

> The Waste Land and The Bridge were not assisted imaginatively by the encyclopedic ambition to which they owe their conspicuous effects of structure. The miscellaneous texture of the poems is truer to their motives.[42]

Bromwich argues that Modernist poets mistakenly supposed that 'the virtual order of human knowledge must stand in some interesting relation to literary form.' Crane pays less obvious homage to past writers in The Bridge than Eliot does in The Waste Land; Crane, like other writers of this period such as Eliot and Fitzgerald, presents 'waste lands' of the spirit but with the purpose of acknowledging man's fall from grace before the 'silken skilled transmemberment of song' can effect its change. Descriptions of possibilities exist alongside descriptions of the constraints of the contemporary world; the constraints need to be admitted before they can be removed. The poet's quest to penetrate the shadows must begin by first acknowledging that 'Only in darkness is thy shadow clear.'

The mood and language of the 'Proem' is religious and meditative, in preparation for the poet's task. Its italicised text reflects the contemplative frame of mind of the traveller preparing to set out on his quest:

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[42] David Bromwich, Skeptical Music: Essays on Modern Poetry, (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2001) 40.

> And Thee, across the harbor, silver-paced
> As though the sun took step of thee, yet left
> Some motion ever unspent in thy stride,-
> Implicitly thy freedom staying thee! (TBB, 13-15)

The tone implies that Crane's quest is a spiritual one; the vocabulary, couched in both Christian and mythological terms, invokes the bridge as a spiritual force. 'Proem' is a statement of pledge by Crane at the beginning of his quest. Yet within the ritualistic grandeur, Crane's poetry has a built-in awareness of his own over-reaching. Consequently the rises and falls within the poem mimic the poet's doubts about his ability to create the poem. Despite the authoritative tone, the soaring motion of inspiration is restrained by the more heavily accented downward movement of 'Till elevators drop us from our day,' and 'A jest falls from the speechless caravan.' The seagull, while 'building high,' is 'shedding white rings of tumult,' until it 'forsake[s] our eyes.' Yet despite this downward pull, Crane's quest will extend our vision by persuading us to follow the seagull's flight to the ocean journey of 'Ave Maria' and further beyond where he will translate the 'inviolate curve' into a curveship that will 'lend a myth to God.'

Crane sets his 'Proem' in winter, and matches its tone to the cold, hard crispness of that season: 'Already snow submerges an iron year....' The 'chained bay waters' are a metaphor for the anxiety that prevents Crane from beginning his quest as well as for the frozen bay while the tension between 'chained' and 'Liberty' is echoed by the alliterative oxymoron of 'Rippling rest.' The seagull's wings are symbols of promise and freedom; just as they 'dip and

pivot him,' they are a reminder that Crane will be dipped and pivoted on his journey through The Bridge. 'Building high' emphasizes that the poet must construct his metaphorical bridge in order to earn his liberty. As the bird races outward to the sea, the watcher's eyes swing round to follow it and themselves gain liberty; through sighting the Statue of Liberty. Both bird and statue then 'forsake our eyes'; their images remain only in the mind, 'As apparitional as sails.' Crane's pattern of encountering an ideal, then suffering its disappearance, emerges once again. Here the bird's flight and the ideals of freedom associated with both the gull and the statue become the visionary spur to lead the poet onwards.

Time, in its chronological form, is given due emphasis by the first word of the next stanza, 'Then'. The repetition of the 'v' consonant in 'inviolate curve,' forces the reader to linger over the phrase, paralleling the watcher's eyes admiring the seagull, but as always in Crane's poetry, perfection is momentary. Words of admiration become words of loss: 'Then, with inviolate curve, forsake our eyes.' The beautiful but insubstantial vision is gradually usurped by day-to-day tedium. Where, in the first stanza, the emphasis in 'building high' implied that there would be upward movement in the poem, the introduction of 'sails,' introduces an outward movement towards the sea. However, the threat that 'sails' will disintegrate into 'sales' is also present. Crane's vision evaporates and the poet crashes down into the day. The descent plunges Crane into despair and a world of 'cinemas, panoramic sleights.'

Crane, the 'prophet' on the 'terrific threshold' of both the bridge and the vision, must observe the illusions 'Foretold to other eyes on the same screen.'

Crane understands the worshipful nature of the cinema audience; he describes the 'flashing scenes' as if they are the guardians of some spiritual truth: 'Never disclosed, but hastened to again.' At the same time, there is a haunting suggestion that the cinema-goers and the poet experience a comparable disillusionment. This acknowledgement of the need to stand in front of some form of deity supports Crane's claims for Brooklyn Bridge. The verse clarifies Crane's thoughts and once more he begins 'building high' by replacing this false god with the bridge. Apostrophising, Crane holds its description up for admiration: 'And Thee, across the harbour, silver paced.' Crane's portrayal emphasizes the bridge's living quality; even in the bridge's inherent immobility there is an emphasis on the life within it:

> As though the sun took step of thee, yet left
> Some motion ever unspent in thy stride,—
> Implicitly thy freedom staying thee! (TBB, 14-16)

Crane captures its mercurial quality within the 'silver paced' reflection of light upon the bridge. The energy of the bridge, 'implicit' in the dynamic shape of the arch, makes it seem poised, like the poet, to begin a journey.

As an incentive to begin his quest, Crane imagines a world devoid of beauty and inspiration. The madman who rushes to the bridge emerges from a dehumanised city. Crane emphasizes that the victim is one of many in hidden places, 'some subway scuttle, cell or loft,' where the alliteration brings out the harshness of such an existence. Further emphasis is given to the image of the falling madman by a moment's composure before his fall: 'A

bedlamite speeds to thy parapets, / Tilting there momently.' The pause is accentuated by Crane's made-up word, 'momently.' The silent man becomes a cinematic image as he falls, 'shrill shirt ballooning.' The pause of the madman reflects Crane's own pause on the bridge; 'tilting,' implies that Crane believes himself to be the imagination's champion yet he too wavers at the edge of the abyss. Crane, recoiling from the suicide, retreats to the safety of the daily cycle of work and machinery to push the poem forward into afternoon with 'All afternoon the cloud-flown derricks turn....'

Having established a base to move forward from, the poem can then return to the bridge with the prayer-like statement: 'Thy cables breathe the North Atlantic still.' Capturing the breeze in 'breathe,' Crane contrasts it with the immobility of the sea air, and his own lack of movement; he has 'still' to begin his quest. Crane, like Milton in 'Lycidas', desires the 'guerdon' of inspiration from the muse:

> Fame is the spur that the clear spirit doth raise
> (That last infirmity of noble mind)
> To scorn delights, and live laborious days;
> But the fair guerdon when we hope to find,
> And think to burst into sudden blaze,
> Comes the blind Fury with th' abhorrèd shears,
> And slits the thin-spun life. (70-76) [43]

[43] Milton, PW.

Like Milton, the poet is aware of the double-edged sword that fame might bring him. By describing the guerdon as 'obscure as that heaven of the Jews,' recalling Marvell's line 'Till the conversion of the Jews,'[44] Crane implies that the poem is addressed to his mistress. Crane desires redemption and forgiveness from his metaphorical bridge; both 'Vibrant reprieve and pardon.' 'Reprieve' suggests that the bridge's gift can only be a temporary suspension from the modern world, but to Crane its beauty offers a vision that lights up his imagination, purifying and transfiguring the lights upon the bridge into an 'immaculate sigh of stars' as night falls.

Crane's description becomes Orphic in stanza eight where the line 'O harp and altar, of the fury fused' suggests that the poet, understanding himself as a modern-day Orpheus, sees the bridge as a physical embodiment of himself although it will also be 'a ship, a world, a woman, a tremendous harp.'[45] Orpheus was the singer and musician of Greek myth. Shakespeare's description of Orpheus, in Two Gentlemen of Verona, is apt:

> For Orpheus' lute was strung with poets' sinews,
> Whose golden touch could soften steel and stones,
> Make tigers tame, and huge leviathans
> Forsake unsounded deeps to dance on sands.[46]

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[44] Andrew Marvell, 'To his Coy Mistress,' The Complete Poems, ed. Elizabeth Story Donno (London: Penguin, 1972). Hereafter Marvell, CP.

[45] LHC 232.

[46] 3.2.77-80.

Crane also wishes to 'soften' the 'steel and stones' of the hearts and minds of the contemporary world, ironically through his bridge of steel and stone. The poet longs to tame with words rather than music. Crane's lines emphasize that vision and inspiration, rather than drudgery, produce beauty, for 'How could mere toil align thy choiring strings!' Alliteration emphasizes that the bridge, the 'Terrific threshold of the prophet's pledge,' is the transformative stage between the mundane and visionary state which all, from the 'pariah' to the 'lover' desire. There is a dash after 'lover's cry' which heralds in night, though this is qualified by its connection to the next stanza which begins 'Again.' 'Again' emphasizes repetition, and this is further qualified two lines later by 'condense eternity.' The visionary power of the bridge is confirmed; its symbolic value exists beyond time.

Crane, inspired by the imagined 'guerdon' bestowed by the bridge, is able to fuse the car headlights with starlight, anticipating his ambition to 'absorb the machine.'[47] The cars are transformed metaphorically into a set of rosary beads; they 'Bead thy path' and highlight the image of the bridge as a gateway to heaven. The religious imagery leads Crane to visualize another 'bridge' image, that of Mary. Mary is the symbol of intercession, the 'immaculate' mother of God and the 'Unfractioned idiom, immaculate sigh of stars.' Like the role Crane aspires to, that of the poet who reveals truths to his audience, Mary enriches vision; through her, 'we have seen night lifted in thine arms.' The emphasis on 'we have seen' implies that this revelation is only now apparent; without an intermediary we cannot see. Against the darkness of the sight, electric lights burn in city windows, like 'fiery parcels all

[47] 'Modern Poetry,' CPSL 261.

undone.' Their light is unlike the light of vision, they do not reveal any truths. Only Crane, watching in the darkness, can see the bridge; those within the lighted rooms cannot. Crane emphasizes this important point with a statement rather than suggestion: 'Only in darkness is thy shadow clear.' Crane must step out into that darkness; he must begin his journey through the poems of The Bridge. The bridge is both the guarantor of and the witness to the poet's quest to emulate its imaginative span across America as it 'Vaults the sea, the prairies' dreaming sod.' The prayer ends with a final plea:

> Unto us lowliest sometimes sweep, descend
> And of the curveship lend a myth to God. (TBB, 43-44)

The final lines, summarizing Crane's intentions in the poems ahead, are an affirmation of his belief in the transformative powers of the poetic vision.

2 'Ave Maria'

'Ave Maria' is the first section in the Bridge sequence, setting out the theme of exploration. It begins with a quotation from Senaca's Medea. The words are spoken by the chorus, and describe the Argonauts' many victories. They refer 'to an age in the far-off years when Ocean shall unloose the bonds of things, when the whole broad earth shall be revealed, when Tethys [Jason's helmsman] shall disclose new worlds, and Thule shall no longer be the limit of the lands.'[48] According to Butterfield,[49] these words predict chaos as they

[48] Translation taken from Lewis 257-8.

[49] Butterfield 157.

foretell a time when man rules the whole world, but they might also describe Crane's vision of a world extended by the imagination and still alert to new horizons: 'Thy purpose—still one shore beyond desire! / The sea's green crying towers a-sway, Beyond.' That chaos is re-enacted through the tension between the hope invested in the quest and the constant reminders of commercialism that undermine its purpose: 'And later hurricanes may claim more pawn....' As Giles reminds us, Columbus's journey 'was an archetypal capitalist venture: money invested in the hope of greater returns.'[50] Giles further points out that 'prophet's pledge' puns on 'profit's pledge'[51] while 'of the curveship lend a myth to God' irreverently suggests a loan. Crane's hopes for his poem are dependent on surmounting the language of money: 'The theme of "Cathay" (its riches, etc.) ultimately is transmuted into a symbol of consciousness, knowledge, spiritual unity. A rather religious motivation, albeit not Presbyterian.'[52]

Through the medium of the Columbian quest, Crane works out his own quest. His anxieties about his ability to begin his quest parallel the anxieties of Columbus. The 'tilting' imagery of the 'Proem' lingers on in 'gleaming mail' but it cannot combat the darkness where 'waves climb into dusk.' Hopes rising and falling are mimicked by the rise and fall of the waves and their corresponding rhythm. The poem concentrates on the return from America; Brunner tellingly describes Crane's Columbus as 'struggling to return home; rather than escaping successfully into an utterly new world, even momentarily,

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[50] Giles 31-32.

[51] Giles 33.

[52] LHC 241.

his Columbus must focus on returning to the source of conflict.' [53] As Columbus is the literary alter-ego of Crane, Brunner implies that it is the poet who is dangerously attracted to conflict. Yet if conflict is inspirational, why does Brunner link 'conflict' with 'struggle' while describing an 'escape' from it as 'successful?' Combs explains this struggle in terms of the Romantic poet's dilemma:

> Always before him was the goal of a valid explanation which it was his calling to approach. Every error that he discovered in another's work or in his own was considered a failure in as much as it delayed the realization of the ideal constitutive metaphysic.[54]

In effect, the poet forces himself to return again and again hoping that this time he will solve the previously unsolved mystery. In 'Proem,' Crane writes: 'Only in darkness is thy shadow clear.' As argued earlier, the line means that only when the sights and sounds of the city, the physical world, are blotted out by darkness, can the bridge, the world of the imagination, be appreciated. In effect, the darkness represents the struggle that Crane faces as he seeks inspiration. This struggle emulates the actions of the poet in 'Proem,' who remains in the world he despairs of, rather than immediately following his vision of the seagull and beginning his own journey. Sugg compares the

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[53] Edward J. Brunner, Splendid Failure: Hart Crane and the Making of 'The Bridge' (Urbana & Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1985) 135.

[54] Combs 3-4.

struggles to return to Europe with the 'record' of discovery to the more general problem of the American writer's struggle to proclaim him/herself:

> The subject of 'Ave Maria' is the struggle of the American imagination, through its objective-correlative Columbus, to move into consciousness and self-recognition, to 'lift night,' to bring to light and life 'the word' of its discovery, the 'truth, now proved' of its own existence. The movement is one of descent from the memory of initial discovery of Cathay (an 'attitude of spirit') into the dark heart of the stormy and immediate situation in which Columbus finds himself, followed by a regeneration, an ascent into light and an assent to the truth of the imagination's accretion-creation of 'This turning rondure whole.' The structure of 'Ave Maria' is that of struggle resolving itself in song, which of course is the structure of The Bridge itself. [55]

Sugg aptly summarizes the structure of The Bridge, with its emphasis on light and darkness, yet without this darkness to struggle against, the light would be without value, validating Combs' claim that conflict is necessary for the poet. The poet journeying through the poems will repeatedly 'climb into dusk on gleaming mail,' struggle 'Crested and creeping, troughing corridors,' then 'fall back yawning to another plunge' before attempting to climb again. Crane must reassure himself that his imagined quest is as worthy as that of Columbus discovering America and convince himself that its attainment is

[55] Sugg 30.

possible. Just as Columbus struggles to return with the news of his discovery, Crane imagines his struggle to bring his message of inspiration to his contempories. The quest isolates Crane, like Columbus, from his world, through the line, 'this truth, now proved,/ That made me exile in her streets.'

Crane's task in 'Ave Maria' is to demonstrate a belief in God which can equate to a belief in the imagination. For Giles, this is one of the sources of conflict within The Bridge:

> The conflict is between the Romantic hero who believes he can subjugate the world in his own person, and the ironic limitations imposed upon this hero by the external world. Epic voyager though he may be, Columbus is still dependent upon the favours of the earth's oscillating tides.[56]

The Columbian God must necessarily be all-powerful, an aggrandized Yahweh figure. He is described in extravagant language to reflect his power: 'This turning rondure whole, this crescent ring / Sun-cusped and zoned with modulated fire / Like pearls that whisper through the Doge's hands.'

For Columbus, God is 'Elohim,' so powerful and awesome that an intercessor is necessary. Crane reminds us through title and example that the Columbian age was one of intercession; the poem title refers to Mary, the Christian symbol of intercession with God. Luis de San Angel, on behalf of Columbus, intercedes with Isabelle: 'O you who reined my suit / Into the Queen's great heart that doubtful day.' When Columbus beseeches the Virgin

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[56] Giles 24.

to grant safe passage, he pleads 'O Madre Maria, still / One ship of these thou grantest safe returning; / Assure us through thy mantle's ageless blue!' Through Columbus's plea to Mary as a link to God, Crane makes us aware that a man who believes in God is dependent upon that God.

From the beginning of this poem, Crane makes his Columbus a very human protagonist by suggesting that the explorer fears that his triumph will be snatched from him. Despite the archaic style of the supposed 'direct' speech, Crane brings Columbus's hopes and fears alive; the reader can sympathize or despair with him. At the same time, as already suggested, Crane is describing his own poetic role within that of Columbus's quest: 'The word I bring,' and 'I bring you back Cathay!' belong to the poet as much as to Columbus. Bringing back the 'word' is the purpose of both Crane and Columbus but it is a purpose fraught with difficulty. Columbus, determined that news of his discovery will survive if he does not, drops a record of his journey into the sea while Crane writes The Bridge. Both men are on a quest; each needs psychological support. Columbus asks Mary to intercede with God on his behalf. For the poet, this external reliance is internalized into an alternative demand upon the imagination but both men recognize the power of 'Some inmost sob, half-heard,' that 'dissuades the abyss, / Merges the wind in measure to the waves.' Columbus's belief in an omnipotent God means that he is both reliant upon and in awe of him: 'Then faith, not fear / Nigh surged me witless...,' almost a joking play on the idea of being 'witless' through fear. Crane's needs are different in that he relies upon his imagination rather than religion but as he cannot order or control his imagination, he too is at its mercy. At best he can nurture and stimulate it for his own purpose, returning

to its source again and again. Giles asserts that Crane's fears are evident in his punning:

> The way in which the insecurities and machinations of an author's unconscious mind are expressed in literary punning has recently been a popular idea among many very interesting post-structuralist critics, notably Derrida, Riffaterre, Jakobson; and it is not difficult to understand how—say—the texts of Tennyson betray more uncertainty than the poet would have cared to admit.[57]

Crane too wants to stand alongside Columbus and state, 'For I have seen now what no perjured breath / Of clown nor sage can riddle or gainsay.' Yet just as Columbus is forced to acknowledge his mortality by the power of the elements, so Crane must acknowledge his reluctance to begin his quest. In 'Ave Maria' the sea is a test of faith that must be overcome in order to experience the reward of 'The first palm chevron the first lighted hill.' The sea is also the testing ground for the poet's imagination; the lines 'Almost as though the Moor's flung scimitar / Found more than flesh to fathom in its fall' create a downward action. The 'Moor's flung scimitar' is the crescent moon, seemingly sinking into the sea. This stanza states a primary concern in Crane's thesis, that the imagination that is 'more than flesh' is discovered through suffering. The lines imply a slow downward spiral, they are part of the pattern of The Bridge; man's path is a fallen one if there is no opposing pull

[57] Giles 2.

from the imagination to create an act of faith. The act of faith is constructed from this redemptive point as the movement becomes outward and upward: 'Series on series, infinite.' Reprieved, Columbus sees the world in terms of Crane's transformed world. Like Hopkins, Crane already sees the beauty of the world. Yet where Hopkins uses Nature as a demonstration of God, Crane views such beauty as a foretaste of the power of the imagination to transform the world into a remade ideal. Crane, emboldened by Columbus's success, is able to move the poem's focus from Columbus's belief in God to Crane's belief in the power of the imagination to transform the world.

This is the purpose of 'Ave Maria', to rehearse for and foretell Crane's own voyage of discovery. In contrast to the chaos of the voyage, Columbus's leap of faith, representing Crane's, has imposed order and purpose. Yet this imposed order is destined to be temporary as the poem's order slides off into the fragmented ending. This inability to remain ordered offends Winters, Tate and Blackmur. Vincent Quinn explains their anti-Romantic stance as 'The animus of the antiromantic position is its anxious regard for rationality.'[58] Combs makes this plea on behalf of Romanticism by arguing that an imposed order destroys rather than organizes:

> We hope to redeem his work from confusion by rendering it orderly and unified, but actually we drain away its life when we speak on its behalf. The content of a Romantic work of art does not possess the kind of order and coherence we assume a belief

[58] Vincent Quinn, Hart Crane (New York: Grosset, 1963) 122.

> system does, because a Romantic work expresses uncensored patterns of experience.[59]

Combs's argument seems to reiterate Tate's criticism that The Bridge lacks unity but his positive stance emphasizes that he is arguing that Crane's 'kind of order and coherence' is different rather than non-existent. Crane's order is an internal one, dependent upon his own awareness. Quinn argues that the 'intuitive revelation that prompted these poems was held in harmony by an organizing force distinct from logic. Crane believed that it came from a level of reality deeper than, but not in contradiction to, reason.'[60]

The poet's order tends to disintegrate after what appears to be a successful conclusion to the poem. As 'Ave Maria' builds to its conclusion, the 'Angelus,' telling of the Annunciation, is translated into a hymn that announces the successful if temporary bringing of the 'word.' The mood of this part is that of formal celebration but Columbus's prayer bears on Crane's own aspirations and describes the poet as much as God:

> O Thou who sleepest on Thyself, apart
> Like ocean athwart lanes of death and birth,
> And all the eddying breath between dost search
> Cruelly with love thy parable of man,—
> Inquisitor! incognizable Word
> Of Eden and the unchained Sepulchre (AM, 57-62)

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[59] Combs 2-3.

[60] Quinn 121.

Crane describes Columbus's imagination in the appropriate terms for the explorer's time, using the imagery of stern and all-powerful divinity; God is 'Inquisitor! incognizable Word / Of Eden and the enchained Sepulchre.' Columbus's God deals out fate, both cruel, causing the 'holocaust of ships,' and kind, 'Urging through night our passage to the Chan.' Crane uses the Old Testament view of God, a deity powerful enough to cause volcanic eruption, evidenced by 'Teneriffe's garnet-flamed it in a cloud.' The volcanic image is balanced by the image of the cloud, recalling Exodus 13, where Moses is guided by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. The 'corposant' or St Elmo's fire supports the suggestion of the pillar of fire and reinforces the guiding hand. Here light is a sign of power, it appears benign as it guides but it also represents control. Time does not exist within this power; it is an image of eternal power, enforced by the range between 'primal scan' and 'teeming span.'

Sugg believes that 'The triadic movement from glory through ruin to restoration is not only the process by which Christ redeems the world but also the process by which the man of imagination creates his "word."' [61] Sugg's statement suggests the poet's creative method is akin to a divine one, yet although the goal of seeking God can be compared to that of seeking inspiration, Crane creates his 'word' by making Columbus's praise of God the equivalent of, rather than the same as the poet's praise for his bridge. Crane connotes Christ through 'Sepulchre' and the 'Kindled Crown,' but his quest is limited only by his own imagination, not by an omnipotent God who controls man by setting boundaries. Combs argues:

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[61] Sugg 36-37.

> The idea of God in post-Romantic thinking means the hypostatized point at infinity towards which the mind moves as it approaches Absolute Knowledge. Absolute Knowledge refers to the mind's continual rediscovery of its own freedom through the mediation of its experience beyond the bondage of whatever critical values limit and stabilize its categories. This process leads to continual re-encounters with the phenomenal world and to a suspension of ultimate judgement about it. So the Bridge and its myth free the mind to see new possibilities for value and beauty. [62]

In the poems, these 'new possibilities' are articulated as visionary experiences but the constant re-encounters and the poet's anxiety are evidence that Crane recognizes that his vision is not permanent.

The 'Hushed gleaming fields and pendant seething wheat / of knowledge' become 'unhooded' through Crane's mediation of his imagined Columbian experience. Like the 'needle in the sight, suspended north,' which guides Columbus's ship, Crane's imagination, 'Yielding by inference and discard,' discovers, 'faith/ And true appointment from the hidden shoal.' Columbus's addresses to his God identify that God with sea and sky as 'one sapphire wheel.' His voyage of discovery has been a voyage to his God as well as to America; faith has guided him as the compass guided the voyage. The stars that guide him, 'In holy rings' are proof of God's existence to Columbus and a portent of the future. Crane has yet to find and follow his

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[62] Combs 115.

star. This recognition must always be 'one shore beyond desire,' because Crane wants us to recognize the importance of the need to seek as much as the importance of the grail. Columbus's will to make passage to Cathay is matched by the poet's desire to travel into the imagination. For Columbus, discovering America had enabled him to discover himself and his God; his achievement has become a burning manifestation of God. The poem ends with a grand statement of belief, but 'O Thou Hand of Fire' is undercut by the broken lines which precede, destabilizing Columbus's triumph. Crane has not yet been able to appropriate Columbus's affirmation; 'Beyond / And kingdoms / naked in the / trembling heart.' It remains 'still one shore beyond desire,' and Crane will continue to search for there is no defined ending to the poem, evidenced by the lack of a formal full stop.

Chapter 4

'Powhatan's Daughter'

'Your hands within my hands are deeds.' (HD, 26)

The Bridge is an imaginative quest through time yet the journey's difficulty over the physical land is strongly emphasized by the poet. These two aspects are paralleled by Crane's desire to succeed in his quest and his awareness of struggle, producing the tension which drives the poem forward. By making his unwillingness to begin an integral part of 'The Harbor Dawn,' the poet highlights the complexity of his commitment to his mission. As long as the quest lies ahead of him, Crane can believe in its success; in consequence, the poet is reluctant to begin. One of the ways that he justifies his reluctance to begin is by lingering in, and reappraising the past, but this betrays the poet's anxieties about the present. Even when 'The Harbor Dawn' returns The Bridge to the poet's time, Crane continues to import images and themes from the first parts of The Bridge to reassure himself about the eventual success of his enterprise.

'The Harbor Dawn' shares the chilled dawn setting of 'Proem', but this poem describes the poet's wakening into his quest; his initial reluctance is projected through muffled images as 'The window goes blond slowly. / Frostily clears.' Brooklyn Bridge is not physically at hand yet the poet makes us feel aware of its presence; the symbolism of the bridge is an uplifting presence

here as throughout the sequence. Its symbolism is represented by the possibilities which are promised in each poem. Vincent Quinn understands 'Ave Maria' as celebrating the first bridge into America while 'Powhatan's Daughter,' of which 'The Harbor Dawn' is the first part, celebrates the bridges launched from native soil.[1] The bridges are as Quinn describes but much more as well; like Crane's language their symbolism is multi-faceted. As Crane is Columbus, and the bridge of 'Proem' is the first bridge of the poem, the synthesis of poet and bridge is all-important to create metaphorical daughter bridges. Each new poem is potentially the hoped-for connection to the unnamed grail; in effect, each poem represents a dream, a hope, as well as a symbolic bridge.

The poet's mood is pensive as Crane wakes in 1920's New York. Representative nuances of the past are gathered in; authors from Homer, Keats, Melville, to Whitman, Tennyson and Eliot linger within the text as 'a tide of voices.' Although The Bridge has its roots in Whitman's poetry, the poem also reacts and responds to many of Eliot's statements; in 'Powhatan's Daughter,' Crane's exploration is conducted through borrowing 'every changing shape / To find expression....'[2] As Vernon Scannell notes:

> He did not make statements about objects or about his experience of those objects; sensuously, imaginatively, passionately, he forced his consciousness to identify itself with

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[1] Quinn 83.

[2] 'The Portrait of a Lady,' Eliot, CP.

> the thing experienced, possess and be possessed by the thing until the words spoke or sang for both.[3]

Like Columbus adrift between the New and Old worlds, the poem hovers between the dream world and consciousness; this concept emerges in the sixth part of T. S. Eliot's later 'Ash Wednesday':

> This is the time of tension between dying and birth
> The place of solitude where three dreams cross
> Between blue rocks[4]

The voices do not urge Crane to wakefulness; they are part of the reverie as 'They meet you listening midway in your dream.' The first voice encountered is that of William Strachey, who describes Pocahontas from a Puritanical viewpoint.[5] Strachey's Pocahontas is shameless; he implies that her nature is wanton. A twentieth-century Crane reinterprets Pocahontas as a nature symbol, fertile with promise and possibility. The use of a quotation from a seventeenth-century history book implies that Crane's poem is going to be historically based but these implications quickly disappear as other voices assert themselves. Crane's poem, in the vein of Whitman's 'Passage to India,' is fascinated by the first bridge from the East to the West. Like

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[3] Vernon Scanell, 'The Ecstatic Muse: Some Notes on Hart Crane,' Contemporary Review 199 (1961): 231-37.

[4] Eliot, CP.

[5] William Strachey, History of Travaile into Virginia Britannica (c.1615).

Whitman, Crane is more concerned with the visionary possibilities of Columbus's voyage than with the discovery of America, which remains symbolic. To Whitman, the voyage is a bridge between east and west:

> Bridging the three or four thousand miles of land travel,
> Tying the Eastern to the Western sea,
> The road between Europe and Asia.
>
> (Ah Genoese thy dream! thy dream!
> Centuries after thou art laid in thy grave,
> The shore thou foundest verifies thy dream.) (62-67)

Crane has absorbed Whitman's poem; the germ that will become The Bridge, hovers at the edge of Whitman's lines, inspiring Crane to sail alongside Columbus as he discovers the 'New World':

> The mediaeval navigators rise before me,
> The world of 1492, with its awaken'd enterprise,
> Something swelling in humanity now like the sap of the earth in spring,
> The sunset splendor of chivalry declining. (143-46)[6]

These lines anticipate Crane's Bridge.

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[6]Whitman, CP.

In The Bridge, the quest is part of a desire for imagining a transformed, rather than transcended present. The disappearance of the Pocahontas vision, '*the woman with us in the dawn,*' launches the poet on a voyage of discovery, like Columbus's, but Crane is not protected by a similar faith. In 'Ave Maria,' Columbus's Christian faith, tested by the storm, is restored when 'Some inmost sob, half-heard dissuades the abyss.' Within The Bridge the poet hopes to find his own approximation of divinity; a viable, alternative faith within the machine that is the modern world. The world might no longer recognize that divinity, but Crane, in spite of being part of the world, remains sensitive to nuances from the past and hears Elohim's 'sounding heel!'

The allusions to Homer's Odyssey, through the reference to the sirens and later, to 'Cyclopean towers,' ensure that these submerged metaphors link the imagination to an heroic quest. Giles argues that 'sirens' are a classical pun for 'bridging of past and present'[7] but other quests are also implicated; there are similar connections to Alfred Tennyson's 'The Princess; A Medley' where Ida derides what Clyde de Ryals calls the 'alluring siren song'[8] of the past:

> If indeed there haunt
> About the moulder'd lodges of the past
> So sweet a voice and vague, fatal to men,

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[7] Giles 9.

[8] Clyde de L. Ryals, Theme and Symbol in Tennyson's Poems to 1850 (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1964) 181.

Well needs it we should cram our ears with wool

And so pace by. (IV: 44-48)[9]

Heroic quests require the protagonist to prove his faith and courage. Often the perils that the poet faces, like those associated with sirens, are disguised. The language of the poem mimics this concealment. The danger signalled in the symbolism of the sirens is almost hidden within the proliferation of 's' sounds which soothe the atmosphere of this stanza while the second alerting word 'stealthily,' is stabilized by 'Serenely,' three words later. Crane creates the sirens' song from the noises from the docks; his imagination transforms the sounds that lure him into day in their seductive calls. The surreptitious dangers of these lines imply that Crane will be tested throughout his quest.

In The Bridge, the poet must search for something akin to Columbus's vision in order to transform his own world. The poem begins with an epigraph that emphasizes Pocahontas's pleasure in her body and, by implication, suggests that she will fulfill the pledge of 'Hushed gleaming fields and pendant seething wheat,' promised in 'Ave Maria.' In contrast, the glosses emphasize the dreamlike character of love and introduce an element of ambiguity. The allusions to Pocahontas's presence, implied by the information of the epigraph and the section title of 'Powhatan's Daughter,' must co-exist with these glosses. To convey that his Pocahontas is an imaginative creation, and that it is the imagination which is divine for Crane, the poet separates spatially the

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[9] Alfred Tennyson, Tennyson: A Selected Edition, ed. Christopher Ricks (1847; Harlow: Longman, 1989). Hereafter Tennyson, SE.

'real' lovers of the poem from the imaginary woman who haunts the off-rhyming, iambic glosses: '*Who is the woman with us in the dawn*?' 'Us' is collective, referring to the lovers in the poem while America, personified by Pocahontas, is '*the flesh our feet have moved upon.*' Because the questions are muted by their position in the italicized glosses rather than being prominent in the body of the main text, they convey a sense of the sleepy poet's musings. Crane's symbolic Pocahontas is still in the wings of the poem, awaiting her call to the fore.

Uroff commenting on Crane's use of symbol, notes: 'When Crane talks about a mythological nature symbol, he is referring not to an actual myth or even to a mythic figure but to an image of his consciousness which, if he could express it, would be infused with a power that he sensed was mythic.' [10] Uroff's point emphasizes that Crane's Pocahontas is the product of the poet's imagination, but this fixing does not detract from the physical nature that Crane celebrates. In this poem, the spiritual and the physical are symbiotic; each depends on the other as Crane's imaginative portrayal describes Pocahontas as the symbol of a land of limitless horizons and possibilities. Pocahontas represents more than the first female; she represents America as well as the wealth of Nature. In addition, she epitomizes the poet's desire to provide America with faith. Like William Carlos Williams, Crane pursues a beautiful woman who is America.[11]

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[10] Uroff 85.

[11] William Carlos Williams, In the American Grain: Essays by William Carlos Williams (London: MacGibbon, 1966).

American literature is often defined by its obsession with the idea of the 'new beginning.' Maggie Holgate, referring to the work of Richard Gray, makes the following observation:

> According to Gray, it was the visionary dimension in Romanticism which particularly encouraged Americans to celebrate the open frontiers and seemingly limitless possibilities of their new American World, a world 'not yet subject to settlement.'[12]

The idea of exploring America, a country without boundaries, is easily translated into Crane's journey through the imagination, but the poet's journey will also be a personal pilgrimage as he struggles to believe in his poem, despite his anxieties about it.

1 'The Harbor Dawn'

'The Harbor Dawn' begins with the past, 'a tide of voices,' gently but 'Insistently' forcing itself upon the poet's waking-sleeping state. The gloss phrase, '*400 years and more*,' implies that one of these voices belongs to Columbus. This is a world of the senses where 'signals dispersed in veils' gradually wake the poet. The poem captures the waking state by imitating the poet's drifting consciousness; the verses drift into each other while the

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[12]Maggie Holgate, 'Breaking as Making: A Study of Visionary Strategies in Hart Crane's Poetry,' diss., Lancaster U, 1992, 16.

deliberately haphazard rhymes imply the poet's unfocused state. The synaesthesia of the first four stanzas mimics the metaphors; their muddled identities keep the images at one remove. Noises are 'fog-insulated,' bells are dimly understood as 'Gongs in white surplices,' and the fog horns are likened to a guitar's 'Far strum of fog horns.' The metaphors work on several levels; 'white surplices' are bells muffled by fog, but 'Beshrouded wails' imply mourning and death, and even, by stretching the metaphor, extend to Ahab's quest to kill the white whale in Moby Dick. The bells, imagined as acolytes dressed in 'white surplices,' add a spiritual quality to the poet's waking and intensify the feeling of ritual of the journey from imagination to reality. Crane often uses religious symbolism to invoke feelings of reverence. Like Moby Dick, The Bridge is a quest for knowledge, akin to Ishmael's description of the whaling voyage as a search for experience: 'the great flood-gates of the wonder-world swung open.'[13] Crane's search for celebration within his own culture corresponds to the quest to find the whale. Both are psychological searches allegorized as physical adventures.

The sounds that half wake the poet in the second stanza, 'As winch engines began throbbing on some deck,' intrude because of their energy. The poet feels their vibrations as well as hearing them; he uses the onomatopoeic terms of 'throbbing,' 'howl,' 'thud,' and the pun on alley-upward, 'Alley-oop,'[14] to authenticate this section. Despite this, the poet slips back into a reverie because 'if they take your sleep away sometimes / They give it back

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[13] Melville 26.

[14] Lewis 291.

again.' 'Sometimes' is balanced between 'take' and 'give' so that it can pivot in either direction with the insinuation that the voices are still playing a part in the dreaming process of 'They give it back again.' 'Sometimes' is also the division between the imagination and reality. The tender nature of this sinking back into sleep is created by alliteration and consonance. Alliteration adds a gentle weight to 'Soft sleeves of sound,' while the consonance of the 's' imitates the drowsy resonance of 'Somewhere out there in blankness steam / Spills into steam.' The 'soft sleeves of sound' attend the 'darkling harbor' as if they wait upon it.' 'Darkling' is borrowed from 'Ode to a Nightingale,' where Keats writes 'Darkling I listen.'[15] In this poem too, the poet listens as the voices appeal to him to wake.

Although the second stanza of 'The Harbor Dawn' anchors the action within Crane's own time, the poet synonymously creates a sense of beginning through his primordial setting where 'Somewhere out there in blankness steam / Spills into steam, and wanders, washed away.' The idea of a formless universe pervades many mythologies; here, in the poem, it suggests the conditions for the emergence of consciousness. In The Goddess, Shahrukh Husain observes: 'Most cosmologies visualize the beginning of all things as chaos or a dark, boundless space, sometimes described as primordial waters. From this rises the first consciousness, which has a desire to create order from the void.'[16] Poetically, the modern world is that sea of

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[15] Keats, SP.

[16] Shahrukh Husain, The Goddess (Boston: Little, 1997) 42.

chaos which the poet's consciousness must order and then reproduce as an imaginative transformation to produce other poems.

'Ave Maria' results from the poet's thoughts upon the bridge of 'Proem', and it, in turn, produces 'Powhatan's Daughter,' but the progression rises and falls as Crane battles to grasp hold of his vision and steer his poem forward. Crane's transformative symbol is Pocahontas who, in her representation of fertile, unrestricted nature, promises fertile, unrestricted imagination, but the poet must also order the poem by 'experiencing' the lives and worlds of its characters. Despite Crane's anxieties about the poem, there is enough optimism to counterpoint the despair of Eliot's 'Prufrock,' who tiredly declares:

> For I have known them all already, known them all—
>
> Have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons,
>
> I have measured out my life with coffee spoons.[17]

The pace of the steam's movement is captured in the way that the words ebb and flow in the fourth stanza; visually, the words ebb and flow upon the page. This is emphasized by language. The fog merges into the bay so that it 'wanders, washed away' and 'eddies / Among distant chiming buoys.' The slowly decreasing alliteration of 'wanders, washed' and 'away' imitates the merging of individual waves into the mass of the sea. This movement mimics Crane's place in his poem. The poet is adrift in half dreams; his thoughts merge into them and he must surface to begin his quest. To signal that the

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[17] Eliot, CP.

process of exiting the dream-world has begun, the language becomes sharper and more precise. The shrill, alliterative fluting of 'Flurried by keen fifings,' and the use of 'keen' slices into the text to prepare for the separation of the word 'adrift'; its isolation is emphasized by a dash. The poet does not hurry this process; in the last line of this stanza 'sky' is poised at the end of the line and prevented from merging into the next verse by a comma. This disjointed run-on reminds us that the poet's anxieties exist within his reluctance. Like the furniture, these anxieties become more apparent in daylight. As light invades the room, the poet moves upwards into consciousness and forward into the poem. This is the beginning of affirmation; Crane's doubts are assimilated into the transformative process, as 'Cool feathery fold, suspends, distills / This wavering slumber.' The metaphor is put in place, then stretched and strained, like Crane's beliefs. The imagination starts to impose order upon images previously perceived as shrouded and indistinct; the chair, overlaid with clothes, gradually becomes visible as the air becomes translucent.

Once the process of imposing order begins, it cannot be stopped although the poet tries to slow the process enough to savour his drifting thoughts. Crane does this through ellipsis, dashes and lines packed with consonants. The poet wants to capture the state of half-sleep or, at the same time, a glimpse of the quest's successful goal, that is his last respite before he begins his task. This is acknowledged in the way in which he acquiesces: 'And you beside me, blessed now while sirens / Sing to us, stealthily weave us into day.' The sibilance is a continuation of the earlier effect but here it carries the weight of inevitability. The poem is almost an aubade but there is not so

much regret at lovers parting as an acceptance that this dream world and sexual episode anticipate the real thrust of The Bridge. 'Your cool arms murmurously about me' suggests that the poem is 'happening' in the present, and the gloss alongside comments in the present tense, '*there in a waking dream to merge your seed,*' but the experience has slipped away while it is happening. The poem is a rehearsal of the main theme of The Bridge. It also exemplifies one of Crane's recurring motifs, that of the elusive vision that disappears after wakening the poet's senses.

The erotic encounter within the imagination is described in like terms to the 'Sweet Idyl' description of Tennyson's poem, 'The Princess; A Medley', suggesting that Crane imagines himself as a similar figure to the Prince in that poem. Both the Prince and Princess undertake a quest but it is the Prince who experiences mystical insights. The last three lines of this piece read:

> Myriads of rivulets hurrying through the lawn,
>
> The moan of doves in immemorial elms,
>
> And murmuring of innumerable bees. (VII: 205-207)[18]

Crane appropriates Tennyson's language with 'While myriad snowy hands,' 'Immemorially the window,' and 'Your cool arms murmurously about me lay', perhaps because Tennyson, according to Ryals, 'stands as the major precursor in the first half of the nineteenth century of the modern English

[18] Tennyson, SE.

symbolists.'[19] Ryals's description of Tennyson's 'talking landscapes,'[20] and the poet's attempt to 'to relate the outer objective world to an inner realm of consciousness,'[21] also describe Crane's poetry. Tennyson's lines imply earthly pleasures; set in the present and promising pleasure in the future. Crane's poem acknowledges that he is perfectly happy within the moment: 'And you beside me, blessèd now.' 'Blessèd' subtly implies that Crane's imaginative union is fruitful but the emphasis on 'now' delicately negates the suggestion and implies an awareness of the temporary nature of happiness.

The 'cool arms' of Crane's reverie echo the divine shaping hand of 'Ave Maria'; its 'Hand of Fire' resurfaces as human hands which shame the world-weary sentiments of 'Prufrock's' protagonist, who declares 'And I have known the arms already, known them all—.'[22] Coupling is intimated through the joining of hands for once the poet is submerged within his passion they are no longer cool. Unspoken words are whispered 'murmurously.' The onomatopaeic and long-syllabled 'murmurously' captures the languor of the moment before the italicised print initiates a pace that becomes urgent as the poet describes his invoked vision and erotic experience of Pocahontas.

Crane makes an association between love and language with *'my tongue upon your throat-singing.'* Love emboldens the poet and convinces him that he is capable of heroic actions for '*your hands within my hands are deeds.*' The gloss of '*there in a waking dream to merge your seed,*' promises

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[19] Ryals 275.

[20] Ryals 275.

[21] Ryals 274.

[22] Eliot, CP.

fertility, tenuously proved by the later 'mistletoe of dreams,' with its implied reference to the birth of the Christ child. More subtly, mistletoe is also the golden bough, connected with inspiration because it is sacred to the Moon-goddess.[23] '*Merge your seed*' prefigures imaginative as well as physical growth, promised by the 'gleaming fields' of 'Ave Maria.' Crane's doubts are assuaged temporarily within the sureness of the lover's response whose '*arms close; eyes wide, undoubtful / dark / drink the dawn.*' The lover's eyes are wide and without hesitation, in contrast to the uncertainty insinuated in the glosses. The eyes that 'drink the dawn' are celebrant and darkened with passion; but also connect to the previous line, where the poet declared 'now before day claims our eyes.' The pairing of words adds emphasis to the line but Crane also weights the italicized section by increasing the pace of the poem. All combine to depict a sexual climax depicted through '*a forest shudders in your hair!*.' The poet emerges into consciousness and the awareness of anticipated loss. The erotic interlude is over; suggestively the poet's eyes are opening.

After this climax, the poet accepts his fate and his sight is gradually restored as the 'window goes blond slowly.' 'Blond' fixes the yellow of the sunlight as it slowly enters the room while 'Frostily clears' extends the metaphor of 'myriad snowy hands' which, as they disappear, usher in the modern world. In a wider sense, 'Frostily clears' also extends beyond this poem to 'Frosted eyes there were that lifted altars.' In his famous letter to Harriet Monroe, Crane explained this line as meaning that the act of worship

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[23] Frazer 701.

is as important as the subject of that worship.[24] Its suggestive intent, at the beginning of Crane's journey to discover his imaginative bridge, is important.

To intimate the difficulties of his quest through the modern world, Crane uses metaphors that imply danger. The Cyclopean metaphor is further extended by Crane's use of 'aglitter.' As the sun's reflection is captured in the glass, the towers become a multitude of baleful eyes, blazing in response. This sun, imprisoned in the glass for a moment, recalls 'The City's fiery parcels all undone,' then escapes into the air, its energy dynamically sprung, through the line break at 'disc / The sun released.' Crane must also break free from his reluctance.

Paul reads the poem as 'a dream of completeness, from which awakening is loss, compelling the need to go in search of the self's "ideal."'[25] In essence, this is the thesis of The Bridge, and of all the long poems, but in addition each Bridge poem is a mini version of the parent poem. The imaginary and 'real' words are mutually exclusive and yet mutually informing. Crane's task is to find the means to reconcile their aspects. In this poem, Crane makes sleep a respite from the task ahead, the poem itself is the springboard for the poet's task. Instead of awakening to loss, Crane makes the sexual encounter a natural end to the dream and part of the process of 'beginning.'

The last fog of morning lingers momentarily as it 'leans one last moment on the sill,' then finally gives up and disappears. As in 'The Love

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[24] CPSL 239.

[25] Paul 198.

Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,'[26] the fog surrounds the building, but Crane's fog is cooler, purer and imaged as 'myriad snowy hands' which insinuate themselves into his dreams. Eliot's fog is a tarnished 'yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes' and is comfortably domesticated, curling about the house before it falls asleep. While Eliot's fog gently influences perception of Crane's, this fog is ready for flight, as it 'leans one last moment on the sill.' Its readiness is a signal to the poet; he too, must leave. Giles understands the fog leaning 'on the sill' as a 'conflict between human edifices and external impingements.'[27] Symbolically, the fog will be dispersed if the quest is successful.

As the fog disappears, the final remains of Crane's dream dissolve because the fog is also a metaphor for Crane's dream state. Crane's poem began in a dreamscape of 'Somewhere out there in blankness,' but the dream dissolves as the poet wakes into modern day and the star disappears. Yet, as with the disappearing bridge and seagull of the 'Proem', Crane is impelled to set out in search of the star and the vanished dream. The line, 'As though to join us at some distant hill—,' is both a promise and a recognition that the poet must begin his quest and follow the star, as the Wise Men followed the Star of Bethlehem. It also echoes 'Ave Maria's' 'One shore beyond desire.' Crane will journey beyond the physicality of 'the mistletoe of dreams, a star—.' In Crane's poetry, dashes emphasize lines. Here, the dash signifies the end of night by physically separating the imaginative dreaming and the last definitive

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[26]Eliot, CP.

[27] Giles 81.

statement which describes how the star 'Turns in the waking west and goes to sleep.' This star is both guide and a symbol of the grail goal. Despite the affirmative movement from sleep to waking, the answers demanded by the glosses suggest that the poet is embarking upon a quest for which he is ill-prepared. While Crane generally associates night with the imagination, he uses the analogy of waking from sleep to imply that the imagination is wakening; the analogy can be stretched to incorporate the imagination trying to impose an identity upon the fog-shrouded objects: 'Slowly— / Immemorially the window, the half-covered chair / Ask nothing but this sheath of pallid air.' In 'Ave Maria,' Columbus's psychological dissection of his own motives results in the wakening of his imagination leading to the great hymn of praise to God in the 'Te Deum' of the second part of the poem. In 'The Harbor Dawn,' the poet wakes into day, his imagination wakes into awareness and, in the marginal notes, something asleep for four hundred years wakes '*from the soundless shore of sleep that time recalls you to your love.*' The poet's struggles to make sense of, and to attach meanings to 'his' own world, will be at least as important as the outcome.

There are echoes of 'Recitative' here; between the fading darkness and the coming of dawn lies the creative world of the imagination where 'darkness, like an ape's face, falls away, / And gradually white buildings answer day.' And yet the image of 'white buildings' is more assured and positive than that of 'snowy hands'; the 'white buildings' are an unqualified emblem of Crane's beliefs, while the hands only suggest possibility. 'Recitative' pre-dates 'The Harbor Dawn' and anticipates some of The Bridge's motifs. Crane described

the poem as a 'confession.'[28] In it, as in 'The Harbor Dawn,' the poet must face the dawn, and leave the dream world of the 'highest tower' to confront the 'real' world of the bridge and wharves:

> The highest tower,—let her ribs palisade
> Wrenched gold of Nineveh,—yet leave the tower.
> The bridge swings over salvage, beyond wharves,
> A wind abides the ensign of your will... (Rec, 21-24)

Ironically, the penultimate line of 'Recitative' reads as a retrospective apology to The Bridge when the poet pleads, 'Forgive me for an echo of these things.' 'Recitative' sets the scene for 'For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen' while 'The Harbor Dawn' anticipates The Bridge. The rehearsal is over and Crane must begin.

2 'Van Winkle'

'The Harbor Dawn' ends with the star in the west beckoning a poet who has seemed reluctant to begin his quest. 'Van Winkle' is part of the process of committing oneself to the quest as the poet familiarizes himself with starting out at one remove. Van Winkle's only goal is to set off upon his journey; his role, as Combs aptly summarizes it, is to represent 'the vital yet hazardous

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[28] LHC 161. 'I enclose the new version of "Recitative" (which may not be final, but which I think is really better than the original confession).'

longing after meaningfulness.'[29] The poet's earlier prevarication is not defined but signalled through the diffused, dream imagery of 'The Harbor Dawn.' Now, in the guise of the reluctant Van Winkle, Crane steps out into the reality of 'Macadam, gun-grey as the tunny's belt'; this emphasis is paralleled by the move from the sea to the land. The westward movement of the poem, from 'Far Rockaway to Golden Gate,' allegorizes the journey of the settlers who travelled west, seeking the grail of a new and better life but the long road is also a type of bridge connecting the east to the west. Sensitive to his own reluctance to step out upon this 'bridge', Crane holds out his hand to his Pocahontas muse, incanting 'Like Memory, she is time's truant, shall take you by the hand...' The glosses emphasize the muse's role as the poet's guide and continue the theme of the Pocahontas-lover figure. In 'The Harbor Dawn,' the glosses imply that Pocahontas '*is the flesh our feet have moved upon.*' In this poem, Pocahontas is the American earth, marked by roads which run riot over her, 'sped by sunlight and her smile...' Crane's symbol in this poem, Van Winkle, is a fictional figure who, in an earlier time, fell asleep for twenty years and woke into an alien world. Crane, as poet-protagonist, is adrift in the world outside of the poem; although he is reluctant to enter, he is also being coerced by his own poetic need to enter the poem and seek his grail. The poet has been summoned to begin his quest but the symbols that beckon him onwards in the line, 'Listen! the miles a hurdy-gurdy grinds— / Down gold arpeggios mile on mile unwinds,' while luring him from 'The Harbor Dawn,' are

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[29] Combs 123.

not enough to stop him from retreating into the safety of the past. There he will sift out its secrets to protect him in the here and now.

Crane carefully maps the physical boundaries of his poem so that he can find his way back from the underworld of memory when ready. The Catskill mountains, where Van Winkle falls asleep, are in New York State, Rockaway is a village on Long Island's Jamaica Bay, Sleepy Hollow is a region of New York State and 'Avenue A' is in the Lower East Side of Manhattan.[30] The verses are tightly organized; the first two lines of the first stanza are the same as the first two of the last stanza. The first verse is the beginning of a retrospective journey; the last verse moves out into the metaphorical journey that forms the body of the poem. In addition, there are two italicised sections, written in a ballad style. The ballad-like quatrains alternate four-stress and three-stress lines. Berthoff describes these sections as self-contained cameos: 'each advances formally by the same kaleidoscope rhythm of notation, the same quickened sequence of dissolves from one evocative phrasing to the next.'[31] Yet the Rip in the first section is firmly centred in Crane's time: '*And he forgot the office hours, / and he forgot the pay*,' making these 'cameos' an integral part of the poem as a whole.

In the first verse, the third and fourth lines rhyme but their meanings clash: Crane counterpoints the harsh 'grinds' with the calming 'unwinds.' The

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[30] Stephen Fender, The American Long Poem: An Annotated Selection (London: Arnold, 1977) 30.

[31] Walter Berthoff, Hart Crane: A Re-Introduction (Minneapolis: U of Minneapolis P, 1989) 100.

verse begins with a harsh-sounding compound adjective, 'gun-grey', which aggressively encapsulates Crane's feelings about the modern world. The second line transforms this harshness into promise, through both meaning and the softening effect of 'Golden' on 'Gate.' The bridge analogy is stated immediately: 'Macadam, gun-grey as the tunny's belt, / Leaps from Far Rockaway to Golden Gate.' 'Leaps' continues the fish-like simile of the road but also suggests joy and enthusiasm. 'Golden,' as always, in Crane, is indicative of promise; but while 'golden' prepares for 'gold arpeggios,' the word 'Down' also betrays Crane's ever-present readiness to fall into despair and escape into the past. The imperative 'Listen' begins this descent into the past evoked by the hurdy-gurdy music. Sherman Paul helpfully points out the allusion to T. S. Eliot's 'Portrait of a Lady': 'It functions in the manner of the street piano...where the young man says, "I remain self-possessed / Except when a street piano, mechanical and tired / Reiterates some worn-out common song."'[32] Although the music appears to lure Crane on, it is the notion of the road which excites him. The 'open road' is a concept that has fascinated many American writers from Whitman to Kerouac. Here, Crane's road winds into the distance, as if it is being unwound from the organ. Crane stresses the length of his intended metaphorical journey by emphasizing the distance between the East and West coasts; Rockaway is extended by 'Far' while 'Golden Gate' refers to the gateway to the Orient, a traditional route to mystery and adventure. Rockaway is also a name associated with the excitement of travel; in Moby Dick, Ishmael declares, 'Why did the poor poet

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[32] Paul 203.

of Tennessee, upon suddenly receiving two handfuls of silver, deliberate whether to buy him a coat, which he sadly needed, or invest his money in a pedestrian trip to Rockaway Beach?'[33] Ishmael implies that the poet will choose the excitement of travel. In contrast, Crane will quest because he must.

Despite these lures, Crane flees from the present and retreats into childhood fixed by 'Times earlier.' Marked out by dashes, the interjection, 'It is the same hour though a different day,' establishes that the past has become the present. The 'you' addressed by the poet is himself as a child. Memory is still, at this point, as rigidly contained as Cortes' horse 'reigning tautly in.' The poet's control extends to refuting Eliot's negativity in 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock'; where Prufrock declares 'I have measured out my life with coffee spoons,' Crane rebuts with 'Firmly as coffee grips the taste.'[34] Without imagination to bridge the gap between memory and understanding, the adverbs 'tautly' and 'firmly' and the verbs 'reigning' and 'grips' characterize the poet's state of mind until the signal: '—and away' lets the rush of memories, enlivened by imagination, sweep him along in a quest to reclaim the past.

Once this dam is broken, these recollected images rush at Crane in mimetically broken sentences: 'And Captain Smith, all beard and certainty, / And Rip Van Winkle bowing by the way.' The abrupt images mix the tumbled thoughts of childhood with America's history and legends. The names conjure up the excitement and thrills of times long gone, from conquerors to romantic

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[33] Melville 23.

[34] Eliot, CP.

heroines like Priscilla Alden, the heroine of Longfellow's poem, 'The Courtship of Miles Standish.' For Longfellow, Priscilla is 'Beautiful with her beauty, and rich with the wealth of her being! / Over him rushed, like a wind that is keen and cold and relentless.'[35] Crane reduces these lines to the alliterative 'Priscilla's cheek close in the wind' but their meaning crosses over Crane's linguistic, imaginative, and metaphorical bridges so that their nuances enrich his own poem.

Through the poems of The Bridge, Crane hopes to discover a way of transferring and restoring this enriching awareness to the present. He attempts this by blending two of Washington Irving's stories, 'Rip Van Winkle' and 'The Legend of Sleepy Hollow,' symbolically mixing fiction and history. The symbolism of this merger is recognized by Wolf: 'But the process is more than that of mere recall; it is also that of the dream, the dream with its startling juxtapositions and interweavings of time stemming from a relatedness of incidents in and out of chronological time.'[36] Despite this amalgamation the poem is imaginative rather than historical; Crane's use of symbols corresponds to the way that he uses words, building layer upon layer to suggest a mood or emotion. The poet manipulates mood by altering pronouns to blur identities. 'You' becomes 'I' as the poet moves from observer to subject and takes on Van Winkle's identity.

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[35] Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, The Poetical Works of Longfellow (London: Oxford UP, 1904).

[36] Jack C. Wolf, Hart Crane's Harp of Evil: A Study of Orphism in 'The Bridge' (New York: Whitston, 1986) 53-4.

Van Winkle's bewilderment at waking into a changed world becomes the poet's bewilderment in his contemporary world. In the same way the 'bedlamite' of the 'Proem' is made use of, Crane draws on the character of Rip Van Winkle. He assimilates him so that he can project Rip as an example. As Lewis notes, Crane splits Rip's name so that each part represents a different life: '...as Rip, he is absorbed by his vision and oblivious to the world of practical affairs; as Van Winkle, he is caught up in the dusty demands of the immediate life ...'[37] Rip represents poetic vision, untainted by modern life while Van Winkle personifies the lack of spirituality in the modern city. Crane wants to be a 'Rip' but fears the quest in case he discovers that he too is condemned to be a 'Van Winkle.' This lack of sureness is betrayed by the line breaking off at the end of the third stanza as Crane becomes aware that he cannot define the character who is also himself: 'And he—.' The next stanza continues in this vogue; it begins: 'The grind-organ says...' then continues with an order to 'Remember, remember' and ends with a command to 'Recall—recall.' The poet becomes part of the collective possessive pronoun 'we' as Crane becomes the child in the poem and commits himself to reliving the past.

This verse also introduces the symbols of the serpent and the eagle which are emblems of nature in 'Powhatan's Daughter.' Here they are present in the embryonic forms of the snakes and planes. Like Crane's idea of the vision, buried within the hum-drum, the snakes are concealed within the child's memory as well as the cinder pile. This cinder pile recalls Fitzgerald's

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[37] Lewis 294.

'valley of ashes.'[38] Danger lurks alongside redemption; the 'cinder-pile,' with its allusions to the phoenix rising in 'as clean as fire', allows hope. This dualism mirrors Crane's ambiguity about the poetic quest; it occurs again and again. The monoplanes are the outward function of Crane's poetic thoughts, symbols of his forays into the imagination, while the prodding stick is the pen that both creates and destroys. The alliteration in 'Some sunning inch of unsuspecting fibre,' dominates this verse until the stanza verse ends with the cleansing image of death by fire, anticipating the ritual death in 'The Dance': 'It flashed back at your throat, as clean as fire.'

The text emulates the child's quick thoughts. By using incomplete sentences Crane captures the racing speech of the child whose thoughts are faster than his words. The two-fold image of the child's memories and the flames in 'rapid tongues / That flittered under the ash heap' imply the cleansing innocence of childhood and fire. There is no pause for consideration until the dash when Crane slows down the memories and comments on imagination as much as the snake's thrust: 'It flashed back at your thrust, as clean as fire.' No longer 'flittering,' the movement of 'flashed back' is laden with revelatory intent. The metaphor running beneath the narrative is one of a hidden danger that, when faced, brings self-discovery. Through the constructed balance between exposure and danger, Crane articulates his belief in the necessity of danger to counterbalance and support the light of his vision:

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[38] Fitzgerald 29.

the rapid tongues

That flittered from under the ash heap day

After day whenever your stick discovered

Some sunning inch of unsuspecting fibre—

It flashed back at your thrust, as clean as fire. (VW, 24-28)

The split between 'day' and 'After day' intimates the long days of childhood where possibilities stretch out endlessly. The italicised section rhyme that follows fixes Van Winkle into the present. Rip's role is that of the poet, surfacing from the past, like the wakening in 'The Harbor Dawn.' Like the poet of 'The Harbor Dawn,' Rip was '*slowly made aware / that he, Van Winkle, was not here / nor there*.'

In tandem with Van Winkle, Crane also resurfaces, now as an adult looking back and judging his childhood memories. The simple rhyming has disappeared; the lines do not follow the regular stress pattern of the first italicised section. The effect produced is one of tension, emulating Rip's stubborn but failed insistence that Broadway is still a part of the Catskill mountains. As the poem moves from the biographical to the self-referential, Crane acknowledges that memories are registers of impressions as well as events. Crane has travelled back into childhood and returned from it with a new perspective but the past still resists definition: 'Is it the whip stripped from the lilac tree / One day in spring my father took to me, / Or is it the Sabbatical, unconscious smile.' The 'it' that connects both questions proves that Crane knows there can be no absolute answer. Unlike Rip, Crane can question the validity of memory but the words used to describe the recall are aggressive;

they associate recall with pain and betray the calm judgement of retrospection through 'strikes' and 'splits.' The questions end with the unresolved dilemma of the mother's 'Sabbatical, unconscious smile,' in the longest verse of the poem. Here, in a chronological sense, is the first instance of Crane almost possessing something that then eludes him and leaves him wanting. Traces of the second part of Eliot's 'Portrait of a Lady' again linger:

> Now that the lilacs are in bloom
> She has a bowl of lilacs in her room
> And twists one in her fingers while she talks.
> 'Ah, my friend, you do not know, you do not know
> What life is, you who hold it in your hands';
> (Slowly twisting the lilac stalks)
> 'You let it flow from you, you let it flow,
> And youth is cruel, and has no more remorse
> And smiles at situations which it cannot see.'[39]

While Eliot's 'lady' is typically nervous, Crane's poem reworks the motifs of lilac, youth and the smile.

Vogler feels that the more insistent references to the mother's smile in Crane's poem are proof of its importance:

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[39] Eliot, CP.

> In the image of his father, he is asking if *this* is his equivalent to the Elohim of Columbus, he may even be asking the psychological question whether this is the source of his need to find now, in his adult life, some means of assimilating this early experience into a pattern of benignity.
>
> With the mother's smile, Crane is asking the same two-part question. Is this the best he can find for his own Mary, or is this the real source of his need for such a figure?[40]

Vogler concentrates on the psychological impact of mother rather than father on Crane but the poet's perception of his father is as relevant. These perceptions are revealed through language; the father's actions towards Crane are unequivocal, he 'took to me' while the mother's are abstract, 'almost brought me.' The question mark that ends this verse implies a lack of certainty about 'And once only' but it does not entirely remove the suggestion that the poet resents the loss of the gift that was almost given.

'Flittered' evolves into 'flickered,' implying a connection between the hidden 'heart of darkness' of the ash-heap and Crane's mother's 'Sabbatical, unconscious smile.' 'Sabbatical' suggests a leave of absence as well as a connection to the Sabbath, as if the poet's mother is not really present in her body but still involved in her worship:

> Or is it the Sabbatical, unconscious smile

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[40] Vogler 159.

My mother almost brought me once from church

And once only, as I recall—? (VW, 37-39)

'Once' is used twice for ironic emphasis; the verse has already made clear that memory is unreliable. Crane's belief in the rebirth of his vision admits to the elusive muse-like promise of the smile: 'It did not return with the kiss in the hall.' The smile follows the pattern of the gull in the Proem; it disappears like the sight of the gull's flight in the Proem, where it 'forsake(s) our eyes.' Here, 'It forsook her at the doorway' making clear that the poet's mother has also been deserted. Despite this acknowledgement, Crane makes obvious his feelings of betrayal through the Judas-like reference of 'the kiss in the hall.' The poet abandons the subject abruptly and leaves both the mother and the past stranded in the penultimate verse.

The poem ends with a repetition that frames the section. Rip-Crane must hurry along to work by streetcar; the poet advises him to 'Keep hold of that nickel for car-change, Rip,—/ Have you got your "*Times*"—?'. The pun on '*Times*' emphasizes both past time and time present. Berthoff believes that 'The Harbor Dawn' and this poem, 'compose a double overture to the panoramic design of "The River," the staccato opening lines of which follow directly from the accelerated beat and excited verbs, "Keep hold," "Have you got," "hurry along," of Van Winkle's closing stanza.'[41] Bertoff's explanation is valid but the 'accelerated beat' also captures the nervous and hurried instructions of the poet to himself as well as the quickening speed of the

[41] Berthoff 100.

departing train. The final admonishment reminds the poet that he must set off on his quest: 'And hurry along, Van Winkle—it's getting late!' Ironically, as the poet begins his own unique journey, he borrows from 'The Waste Land' (the end section of 'A Game of Chess'): 'HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME / HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME.'[42] The similarity betrays him; despite his courage, he is fearful.

3 'The River'

'The River' starts the quest proper after 'Van Winkle,' providing a path to follow. Crane's earlier poem 'Repose of Rivers' recounts the journey from source to sea, told by the river itself. Some of the imagery of that poem is reworked in this section. 'While sun-silt rippled them / Asunder...' and 'its singing willow rim' become 'vascular with silted shale' and 'No embrace opens but the stinging sea.' In both, the rivers are symbols of the quest, witnessing life as they travel onwards to their destinies. The image of the twisting, tortuous river is analogous to the seeking nature of the poet's quest.

This section of The Bridge starts off firmly anchored in the billboards and advertising jargon of Crane's America. Crane's setting is a modern-day version of Tennyson's 'The Princess; A Medley':

> We follow'd up the river as we rode,
> And rode till midnight, when the college lights
> Began to glisten firefly-like in copse

[42] Eliot, CP 69.

And linden alley. (203-206)[43]

While Crane's rhymes are not regular, there are enough rhyming couplets to mimic the regularity of the train's wheels upon the track. Lines run-over, dashes emulate the natural pauses of speech while the lack of full stops imitate the flow of thought. The physical quest is carefully constructed to pass through places that make the journey seem an accurate record of travel. Brand names and the names of actual people such as Bert Williams and Dan Midland act to validate the time. As well, Crane explores the nameless, dispossessed characters that people his quest. By making them part of his childhood memories, Crane promotes the autobiographical nature of the stanza: 'Behind / My father's cannery works I used to see / Rail-squatters ranged in nomad raillery, / The ancient men.' These men are Crane's opposition to the machine-age but their victim-like demeanor, and the word 'Limited' in the stanza that introduces them, makes them an unreliable opposition:

So the 20th Century—so
whizzed the Limited—roared by and left
three men, still hungry on the tracks, ploddingly
watching the tail lights wizen and converge, slip –
ping gimleted and neatly out of sight. (TR, 19-23)

[43] Tennyson, SE.

The new century and the train leave them stranded aimlessly; Crane parallels the train lights severing past from present, by bisecting 'slipping.'

Although the piece is entitled 'The River,' the majority of the poem is concerned with the railroad until the last section, when the track metamorphoses into the river to symbolize the taking back by nature. The railroad is a symbol of the machine mastering nature but as the poem progresses, the frenzy of its speed is gradually reduced until the river comes into its own. The westward movement of the railroad dictates the opening direction of the quest. Not only is the train the means of transport of the quest, its name, '20th Century Limited,' puns on the technology of the age. Crane's quest leads the poet Crane across America; the task he sets himself is that of altering the rush and frenzy of the present to the pace of the river's natural movement, southwards. Initially, the poem's premise suggests that the railroad has overcome the river, and conquered space and time. Ultimately, however, the river triumphs, as Crane anchors his generation within a continuum that re-affirms life's cycle and the inevitability of time in the line, 'You are your father's father.'

Crane reinforces the fragmentary nature of modern life by letting flashes of advertising define it. The first twenty-three lines echo both Eliot and Joyce in the use of colloquial speech and the 'stream of consciousness' style, while synaesthesia, in 'whistling down the tracks / a headlight rushing with the sound,' assaults and confuses the senses. The poet uses the glosses to make comments on the brashness of the age as the train rushes '*past the din and slogans of the year.*' To transform the present, Crane must first deconstruct it; he does so by translating the destructiveness of modern

communication into the dark night of the soul; the 'telegraphic night coming on' misquotes St John of the Cross. The pun on 'Certain-teed Overalls' mocks the certainty of the age, while the broken capitalisation of 'RUNning' in line seventeen signals Crane's intentions to break down such assurance. 'EXpress' is revivified by its miscapitalization which alters emphasis. Margaret Schlauch points out that this is not original:

> Poetic effect through etymology was achieved frequently by Emily Dickinson, whose influence can be felt pervasively in contemporary American poetry. She often vivified stale words by reaffirming the meanings of their parts, as when she makes *express* once again mean to 'press out' in the physical sense, or *circuit* mean 'a going round about something':
>
> Tell the truth but tell it slant,(*sic*)
> Success in circuit lies...[44]

Although Crane imitates Dickinson's effect here, his quest is described cumulatively rather than in 'slant' fashion.

The first section builds up, line by line, proof of spiritual degeneration, through the poet's use of such linguistic effects. Without the prop of religion, evidenced by 'connecting ears and no more sermons,' Crane's America is left wanting. He ends this first section with a Shakespearean title, 'as you like it'

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[44] Schlauck 30-31.

to sum up the present but with ellipsis and 'eh?' ironically proves that America is not listening.

Having demonstrated his country's moral torpor, the poet must now seek a solution. As science has overwhelmed society, Crane must look at those outside of it for inspiration, '*to those whose addresses / are never near.*' The three hoboes are an ironic allegory of the three Wise Men, but their 'quest' belongs to Crane rather than to God. Hazo understands these men as authorial devices, describing the three tramps as 'Crane's transitional symbols of quest.'[45] Hazo correctly asserts that the poet uses his characters as vehicles to travel through the poems; as with the bedlamite and Rip Van Winkle, Crane assimilates their experiences so that he, as poet, can be the sum of such experience. Ultimately, the wanderers cannot live up to Crane's hankering after something he himself is unsure about, but the pointers they provide will help him on his quest. Despite their rejection by, and of society, Crane claims a shared identity in 'I have trod the rumorous midnights, too,' but we recognize the rhetorical nature of this assertion. Crane will cast off the hoboes' identities in the same way that the train leaves behind the tramps 'ploddingly / watching the tail lights wizen and converge, slip- / ping gimleted and neatly out of sight.'

The train's disappearance is the signal for the physical division in the text, highlighting the change from the accelerated pace of the freeform first part to the more contemplative rhyming section. In contrast to the 'wireless' communication of the early part, here there is an ambiguous emphasis on

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[45] Hazo 86.

connections:

> Loped under wires that span the mountain stream.
>
> Keen instruments, strung to a vast precision
>
> Bind town to town and dream to ticking dream. (Riv, 25-27)

'Keen' implies sharpness and incision; the wires that bind are also the means of severing 'town' from 'town' and 'dream' from 'ticking dream.' Although 'ticking' is a reminder of the inevitability of time, time can also be savoured, as in 'some men take their liquor slow—and count / —Though they'll confess no rosary nor clue— / The river's minute by the far brook's year.' Crane wants his hoboes to typify natural instincts, despite, or because of 'no rosary nor clue.' As 'blind baggage,' they react instinctively; the poet ascribes to them a 'Strange bird-wit.' Crane ennobles his hoboes, because of the quest they are elevated to mystics. Yet, his own doubts remain visible in 'Time's rendings, time's blendings they construe' and the disjointed representation of thoughts. Disorganized speech patterns belie the level of instinctive knowledge that Crane desperately wants in these wanderers. Lewis acknowledges Crane's need to believe in the hoboes as historically based because they represent 'the race of ignorant wanderers who are, all unknowingly, closer to the divine than ever the city-folk can be; pastoral Charlie Chaplins, so to say, new Cranian instances of the lowest of the low who can yet point the way towards the great transformation scene.'[46] Lewis captures Crane's dilemma in this

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[46] Lewis 300.

statement; the poet stands separate from other men by virtue of his calling yet he needs to profit from their experiences.

Crane constantly mutates his characters, always hopeful that the next one will provide the key. He does this by merging the songs sung by his hoboes into the speech of the road gang; the smooth transition comes about through shared song titles:

> Strange bird-wit, like the elemental gist
> Of unwalled winds they offer, singing low
> *My Old Kentucky Home* and *Casey Jones*,
> *Some Sunny Day*. I heard a road-gang chanting so. (Riv, 37-40)

'Singing low' alludes to 'Swing Low, Sweet Chariot.' These songs, or 'negro spirituals' effectively unite the hoboes and the road-gang, but, along with 'they', stress their dissimilarity to the poet. Crane projects his own needs onto his characters; although it does not seem to be Crane who says: '—And when my Aunt Sally Simpson smiled,' the memory of his mother's 'almost' smile from 'Van Winkle' hovers over the sentence. Other ghosts linger here too: there are several references to The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn in the poem, so 'Aunt Sally' might also be the civilizing influence that Huck, alias Crane, famously rejects at the end of the novel: 'But I reckon I got to light out for the Territory ahead of the rest, because Aunt Sally she's going to adopt me and sivilize me and I can't stand it. I been there before.'[47]

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[47] Mark Twain, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (1884; London: Penguin, 1985) 369.

Despite Crane's hopes for his itinerants, they resist his vision until the poet is forced to reassess 'Blind Baggage' as 'Blind fists of nothing, humpty-dumpty clods,' and the poet leaves them behind. He abandons them, not for their inability to progress onto adulthood, but for their inability to be the visionaries that he would like them to be. Wolf suggests that Crane was influenced by Milton's 'blind mouths that only feed,' in his choice of 'blind fists.'[48] Although both phrases relate to survival, there is a difference; Milton is attacking greed; Crane, more poignantly, is talking about self-preservation. Crane's hoboes are doomed to fall as 'humpty dumpty clods' despite their temporary elevation to rootless mankind in search of lost innocence. As searchers, even if they do not know for what, they hold out the hope of spiritual development and this makes them comparable to the poet who also knows 'a body under the wide rain.'

The gloss notes clarify that the body is that of the earth and that 'knowing' does not need intellectualizing beyond '*but who have touched her, knowing her without name / nor the myths of her fathers...*' 'Knowing' reopens the sexual connotations of the poem. Crane eroticizes the earth as a way of showing its desirability. Man lurks 'across her, knowing her yonder breast / Snow-silvered, sumac-stained or smoky blue—.' Each pairing of words implicates a sexual pairing as well as emphasizing the physical ideal that is Pocahontas. Although the poet's knowledge of the Pocahontas figure is limited to dreams, signalled in 'I have trod the rumorous midnights, too,' dreams are a prelude to his vision even when the dream is accompanied by

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[48] Wolf 61.

the nightmare-like sounds of 'wail,' recalling 'The Harbor Dawn', 'Papooses crying', and 'Screamed redskin dynasties. 'I' dominates this verse while the metaphors and similes concentrate on animal images that prepare for 'The Dance.' The personal pronoun also proves that Crane has taken control of the poem; as he starts to bend the poem to his will, he connects the Earth Mother to the Indian maiden, Pocahontas, who haunts him. The line runover works to mimic the snake draped over Pocahontas's shoulder:

> Time like a serpent down her shoulder, dark,
>
> And space, an eaglet's wing, laid on her hair. (Riv, 80-81)

The serpent suggests sexual knowledge; Crane writes 'I knew her body there,' again anticipating the fertility ritual of 'The Dance,' but this section has intensified his desire to find the woman who eludes him except in dreams. Uroff reads this verse as a 'nightmare confrontation with the body of the continent appearing as a Medusa-like figure who elicits screams and wails.'[49] Crane himself, declares these images 'Dead echoes!' and, as the verse precedes the frenzied ritual in 'The Dance,' the stanza, in retrospect, is an antecedent. It is more a description of excess than nightmare.

'Dead echoes' moves the poem backwards to pre-Christian days with the '*myths of her fathers*' and 'The old gods of the rain lie wrapped in pools.' While 'eyeless fish' pre-date 'blind fists,' the emphasis on 're-descend' stresses that the earth has witnessed umpteen lives, played out again and

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[49] Uroff 93.

again. Wolf helpfully explains that the 'corn from querulous crows' is a reference to the ancient belief that crows were the keepers of the sacred alphabet,[50] but the text suggests that 'such pilferings' are more the retaliatory reactions of the old rejected gods who 'doze now, below axe and powder horn.' The language is the language of ancient beliefs; 'propitiate' recalls the sacred offering to offended gods while the wood cut down for the railway represents the tearing down of the sacred groves in the line, 'always the iron dealt cleavage.'

The poet 'propitiates them for their timber torn / By iron,' by using language as a weapon against the railway. The language becomes aggressive and masculine as Crane describes its pillaging:

> And Pullman breakfasters glide glistening steel
> From tunnel into field—iron strides the dew—
> Straddles the hill, a dance of wheel on wheel. (Riv, 90-92)

The railway is portrayed in terms of its victory over nature. Repetition, alliteration and rhyming couplets mimic the turning wheels which ironically recall the sapphire wheel of 'Ave Maria,' and the everturning somersaults of Pocahontas in the epigraph to 'Powhatan's Daughter.' The symbolism of the river slowly overwhelms that of the train as 'natural images' flood the text and the circles insist on the seasonal cycle. Alternate rhymes gradually assert control over the poem as true order is restored and the journey enters the

[50] Wolf 62.

realm of Huck Finn's raft ride down the Mississippi, where 'Southward, near Cairo passing, you can see / The Ohio merging,—borne down Tennessee.' The presence of the river, rather than the railway, is emphasized by the song title, '*Deep River*' which recalls Eliot's 'Fire Sermon': 'By the waters of Leman I sat down and wept...'[51]

The knowledge that Crane takes from this part of his quest is that time and space are eternal. In comparison, man is simply a small part of the continuum. The hoboes are balanced by the tobacco-chewing 'Sheriff, Brakeman and Authority, described through 'Hitch up your pants and crunch another quid,' but all are mortal. Crane's statements become part of the equilibrium of 'you too feed the river timelessly, / And few evade full measure of their fate,' reworking the language of Lincoln's Gettysberg Address to add dignity and weight to his poem: 'that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they here gave the last full measure of devotion.'[52]

Gaining precedence, the 'River' is capitalised as it exerts its influence upon the poem; the journey is no longer west, and conquering, but southwards, with a more stately pace. The direction of the poem mimics that of the river downwards and outwards: 'Down, down,' and 'The River spreading, flows.' 'Spreading' promotes the lava-like inevitability of the river's passage, emphasized by the later 'basalt.' The imagery is also reminiscent of

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[51] Eliot, CP.

[52] Abraham Lincoln, The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln, ed. Roy P. Basler, vol.7 (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1953) 23.

Huck's and Jim's drifting idyll down the Mississippi. In contrast, the hoboes, those 'pioneers in time's despair,' also 'drift in stillness' but their lives drift inexorably onwards towards death which 'spends your dreams.' The hoboes' rejection of authority is not enough to secure vision; they serve as a warning to the poet: 'What are you, lost within this tideless spell?' The poet, in turn, speaks his own warning about the river and his poem, 'The River, spreading, flows—and spends your dream.' Without vision, dreams will pass with the stream of time. The river parallels the stream of life; it cannot be stopped but it can be appropriated. Crane immortalizes the individual by making each person an integral part of this stream: 'You are your father's father, and the stream— / A liquid theme that floating niggers swell.' This difficult line remains deliberately ambiguous; perhaps a mocking indictment of the stereotypical 'lazy' black man of Huckleberry Finn, or a fleeting glance towards Uncle Tom's Cabin[53] and Heart of Darkness.[54]

Crane's depiction of the black man is influenced by Sherwood Anderson whose work impressed and moved him:

> I would like to see Anderson handle the negro in fiction. So far it has not been done by anyone without sentimentality or cruelty, but the directness of his vision would produce something new and deep in this direction. In the winter and spring of '20

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[53] Harriet Beecher Stowe, Uncle Tom's Cabin or Life among the Lowly (1852; Harmondsworth: Penguin,1981).

[54] Joseph Conrad, Heart of Darkness (1902; London: Penguin, 1994).

> Anderson was in southern Alabama near the sea finishing Poor White, and his interest in the black man became so aroused that he wrote me,—'The negroes are the living wonder of this place. What a tale if someone could penetrate into the home and the life of the Southern negro and not taint it in the ordinary superficial way.'[55]

Crane's black people are but one group of dispossessed in the poems but he tries to present a honest record of the way 'They win no frontier by their wayward plight / But drift in stillness, as from Jordan's brow.' Instead, they are treated with dignity, 'born pioneers in time's despite' to distinguish them from the selfishness of Blake's pebble, which 'builds a Hell in Heaven's despite.'[56]

Again and again, the river is described through its inexorable passage of 'Grimed tributaries to an ancient flow,' but the river's poetic identity is always present in the guise of 'undertowed sunlight': 'O quarrying passion, undertowed sunlight! / The basalt surface drags a jungle grace.' Whitman employs a similar tactic in lines 8-10 of 'As I Ebb'd with the Ocean of Life,' where he 'Was seiz'd by the spirit that trails in the lines underfoot, / The rim, the sediment that stands for all the water and all the land of the globe.'[57] The poetic river 'drags' memories and phrases from the earlier poems but it is

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[55] CPSL 212.

[56] William Blake, 'The Clod and the Pebble,' Blake: The Complete Poems, ed. W. H. Stevenson, 2nd ed. (London: Longman, 1989). Hereafter Blake, CP.

[57] Whitman, CP.

always 'hushed.' Crane's dignified lines state 'You will not hear it as the sea; even stone / Is not more hushed by gravity.' The lines also describe the quest.

Giles understands these lines as meaning that 'the river is no more likely to cease flowing than a stone is to start leaping around in mid-air.'[58] Blake's pebble is silenced. 'Hushed' is a laden word for Crane, associated with promise and possibility. 'Hushed willows anchored in its glow,' are associated with the 'imaged Word' in 'Voyages VI,' 'Hushed gleaming fields and pendant seething wheat' are promised in 'Ave Maria,' while in 'Cape Hatteras,' the poem's potential is described through 'the hushed land.' The river has become a symbol of search, as well as time, with its 'quarrying passion.'

Like Crane's other 'sun-silted' river, in 'Repose of Rivers,' neither obstacle nor memory can hinder its progress as the river mourns 'I could never remember / That seething, steady leveling of the marshes / Till age had brought me to the sea.' Yet here, Crane cannot state 'I could never remember,' Crane's Bridge is dependent upon memory. The river seeks out its way: 'drink[ing] the farthest dale' as it continues its unstoppable progress, emphasizing its instinctive, animal-like nature through 'The basalt surface drags a jungle grace.' 'Drags' captures the image of the river's flow, pulled by currents and 'undertowed sunlight' while Crane's triple use of the harsh 'g' sounds reinforces the underlying savagery of the metaphor. There is no trace now of 'The Harbor Dawn's' domesticated cat, which 'leans one last moment

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[58] Giles 55.

on the sill.' The poet's river slinks 'Ochreous and lynx-barred in lengthening might,' camouflaging not only the river but the river's purpose to reach its lair: 'Patience! and you shall reach the biding place!' Compared with T. S. Eliot's river, which 'sweats / Oil and tar,' in 'The Fire Sermon,' Crane's river is grander and more purposeful. Even New Orleans, 'the city storied of three thrones,' with 'the freighted floors' cannot stop the river:

> Down two more turns the Mississippi pours
> (Anon tall ironsides up from salt lagoons)
> And flows within itself, heaps itself free.
> All fades but one thin skyline 'round. (Riv, 135-138)

The stanzas have become rhymed quatrains, setting them apart from the preceding lines. The river's image transforms, becoming a snake, rather than a big cat; it rears as if about to strike: 'The River lifts itself from its long bed, / Poised wholly on its dream, a mustard glow / Tortured with history, its one will—flow!' The memory of 'Repose of Rivers' 'heaps itself free' from this stanza:

> And finally, in that memory all things nurse;
> After the city that I finally passed
> With scalding unguents spread and smoking darts
> The monsoon cut across the delta
> At gulf gates... (RR, 17-21)

Throughout the poem, the river has been identified with religious ritual, with dreams, sexuality and fertility and shown its own submission to the cyclic patterns, in 'For you too feed the River timelessly.' It has been almost overwhelmed, like the discoveries and voyages suggested by 'Over De Soto's bones.' It might be 'choked and slow,' signifying the gulf between man and nature, but it has achieved its destiny of meeting the ocean, where all rivers end. The river's dive into the sea is sacrificial, as it 'flows within itself, heaps itself free' and 'All fades but one thin skyline 'round...' The horizon, 'one thin skyline,' is austere and sharply defined unlike the erotic, embracing horizon of 'Voyages III' (2-4), where 'This tendered theme of you that light / Reprieves from sea plains where the sky / Resigns a breast that every wave enthrones.' This skyline is the uncompomising partner of the river in this poem which cannot be deflected from 'its one will—flow!'

The ellipsis marks the change in the poem as the river, representing the poem, 'heaps itself free' but this freedom is expressed in terms of sacrifice, anticipating the climactic sacrifice in 'The Dance':

> ...Ahead
> No embrace opens but the stinging sea;
> The River lifts itself from its long bed,
>
> Poised wholly on its dream, a mustard glow
> Tortured with history, its one will—flow!
> —The Passion spreads in wide tongues, choked and slow,
> Meeting the Gulf, hosannas silently below. (Riv, 138-44)

'Poised wholly on its dream' recalls the poet's reluctance to leave the dream-like mood of 'The Harbor Dawn'; the intermixed references imply that Crane's progress through the poems is as inevitable as that of the river. 'The River' flows between 'Van Winkle' and 'The Dance' merging images that have gone before and those that are to come. In 'Van Winkle,' snakes and tongues of fire are described synonomously. Here, a long way beyond the possibilities of childhood, 'wide tongues, choked and slow' produce silent celebration with 'Hosannas silently below.' Yet despite this constraint, the 'undertowed sunlight' that represents the poetic symbolism of the river is full of promise. This promise is supported by the religious significance of Christ's Passion and the 'hosannas' which celebrate the resurrection. Giles observes:

> Crane's capitalization of 'Passion' serves to emphasize the pun Eugene Paul Nassar noted here swinging between 'the river's passion to flow' and 'Christ's Passion': so that 'Meeting the Gulf' denotes not only the Mississippi meeting the Gulf of Mexico, but also Christ's task of meeting the gulf—bridging the gap—between God and the human race.... So in this stanza the American landscape has become apotheosized, and the mouth of the Mississippi punningly interacts with the mouth of a Communion suppliant.[59]

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[59] Giles 15.

The compressed metaphors at work here are, as Roger Ramsay notes, 'the linguistic equivalent of transubstantiation.'[60] This Eucharistic image occurs again in 'Quaker Hill as a 'sheaf of dust' when despair threatens to overwhelm the poem.

The ending of this poem prepares and anticipates the cleansing sacrificial fire that awaits the poet in 'The Dance.' The sacrifice is willing as the river reaches out to the healing embrace that awaits 'Ahead,' despite 'No embrace opens but the stinging sea.' In Crane's poem, it is the river rather than the poem which kisses the sea, unlike Whitman's poem, 'As I Ebbed with the Ocean of Life,' where the poet, punished for being a singer, declares 'Nature here in sight of the sea taking advantage of me to dart upon me and sting me / Because I have dared to open my mouth to sing at all.'[61]

Journey's end is part of the process of renewal, anticipating the death ahead in 'The Dance.' Man lives then dies but continues in the generations: 'You are your father's father.' The river is hushed, as it has been throughout, represented by actions rather than speech, which have proved indomitable, proved by 'its one will—flow!' Despite the austerity of the river, there is a celebratory feel to the ending of the poem because the river has fulfilled its part of the quest, revealed by the way that the last four lines share the same rhyme. The river's progress through one hundred and thirty seven lines to a destination summed up in seven lines emphasizes the importance of the journey rather than its ending; it is also a blueprint for Crane's long journey

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[60] Quoted in Giles 14.

[61] Whitman, CP.

through his Bridge. Crane steps outwards from this silence. 'Poised wholly on [his] dream,' the poet must free his voice and seek a renewal of the vision elsewhere, travelling upon the river that flows from one section to another until the poem reaches 'Atlantis.'

4 'The Dance'

'The River' provided Crane with a physical model of quest in its journey across and downwards through America. In 'The Dance,' Crane again marks out the very American nature of his quest by validating his imaginary journey with the names of two mountain ranges; the Appalachians and the Adirondacks, and two areas, Cumberland and Labrador. Although all of The Bridge can be read as a response to T. S. Eliot's The Waste Land, there are particularly audible references in 'The Dance.' The poem also borrows language and images from Tennyson's 'The Princess; A Medley.' Within the river's journey, Crane faced the inevitability of death; the poet's aim in 'The Dance' is to understand the way in which man tries to exert control over his mortality through faith. The poem's central motif is one of renewal through sacrifice; emboldened by his faith in his vision, Crane parallels his search for an imaginative solution to the modern world's stagnation by enacting a primitive Rite of Spring. Crane's solution is demonstrated by the winter-king impregnating the earth, an idea central to most primitive vegetation beliefs, from the legend of the Fisher-King to Native American beliefs.

Crane assumes the character of Maquokeeta, the lover of Pocahontas and imagines himself fulfilling and renewing the earth in a metaphoric parallel to his desire to transform the modern world. Because he is male, the only

way that Crane can merge into the earth's memories is by mating with her representative, Pocahontas. Quinn is in agreement with this view; he believes that 'The Dance,' 'celebrates the nature rituals of the Indians, who knew the continent as a lover his beloved.'[62] Crane's entry into this poem takes place very quickly; he uses 'we' and 'us' from the ninth line as he starts the process of assuming the mantle of '*her kin, her chieftain lover.*'

The poem is written in quatrains with alternate lines rhyming, following on from the last section of 'The River.' This pattern leads 'The River' into 'The Dance', although the poems have very different moods. Berthoff describes these pentameters as having 'an audibly different syntax and voicing [which] gave it what Crane especially wanted for it, a contrasted rhythm of its own—"a rapid foot-beat."'[63] The sections need to be dissimilar to provide the varied encounters that Crane needs to identify with and experience; poetically, the poet's progress from one section to the other imitates the different terrains encountered in the journey. 'The River' ends in stately procession, 'choked and slow', whereas 'The Dance' is redolent with human movement from the beginning as 'The swift red flesh, a winter king' replaces memory of the railway.

'The Dance' begins with a consideration of the seasons, introducing the 'winter king' and the 'glacier woman' as the symbols of Crane's personal rite. It promotes the idea of a fruitful Spring as an analogy to poetic creativity; for

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[62] Quinn 88.

[63] Berthoff 102.

Crane, April is not meant to be 'the cruellest month'[64] although he too will mix 'Memory and desire.' The inverted seasonal cycle starts with winter and works back to spring. Wolf, arguing for the Orphic nature of 'The Bridge,' understands this as:

> a reversal of the Christian inversion of myth to its original pre-Christian state of wholeness. It makes poetic or mythological sense to do so because the reversal takes us back from the end of things, the apocalyptic, dead-end of Christianity, to the fecundity of the Primal Myth; instead of going from the New Year, at the winter solstice, around the cycle of death of the year at mid-winter, Crane takes us from the death of the year (and of spiritual vision) back along the cycle to the beginning of vision, to the spring of mankind's dreams, to 'its first invasion of her secrecy.'[65]

Wolf's theory is based upon the idea of returning to a 'golden age' and beginning again but the cyclical nature of this poem emphasizes that the option of returning to the dawn of time is not an option. Northrop Frye, in an essay entitled 'The Journey as Metaphor' makes the following point:

> A journey is a movement from here to there, from point A to

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[64] 1st line of 'The Burial of the Dead,' Eliot, CP.

[65] Wolf 66.

> point B, and as a metaphor for life, the two points are obviously birth and death. But this is true only of the individual: the containing way or direction is cyclical. When the cyclical movement enters the individual life, we have the form of journey we call the quest, where a hero goes out to accomplish something, kill a dragon, deliver a heroine from a giant, help destroy a hostile city or what not.[66]

Frye's argument is a general one, not specifically related to Crane, but its cyclical emphasis, although it aptly describes 'The Dance' and indeed The Bridge, reflects the subject's wider appeal. Eliot's later poem, 'Ash Wednesday,' proves continual interest in the theme: 'The new years walk, restoring / Through a bright cloud of tears, the years, restoring / With a new verse the ancient rhyme. Redeem / The time. Redeem / The unread vision in the higher dream.' While 'Ash Wednesday' simplifies, perhaps signifies hope, the poem has a complex relationship with 'hope,' which at a later stage the poet repudiates: 'Because I do not hope to turn again / Because I do not hope.' The poem is also existential, acknowledging that the poet creates the poem, 'Consequently I rejoice, having to construct something / Upon which to rejoice.' Crane also constructs, but while he creates symbols to inspire himself, his aim is to unlock 'the unread vision.' Despite the difference in proposed outcomes, both poets rely on the familiar concept of the journey as an analogy of life.

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[66] Frye, Myth 213.

The poem begins with the pattern broken, symbolized by the poet's questions. Crane, ready to replace the king, questions the legitimacy of the winter king as consort, 'Who squired the glacier woman down the sky?' This role is already rehearsed in 'The Harbor Dawn.' There, the dream love-sequence also has a 'glacial quality'; the sequence takes place against a background where 'myriad snowy hands are clustering at the pane.' Here, as in other poems, ice and snow are used to make direct statements about the emotional state of the poet's mind. In 'Voyages V,' the frozen landscape reflects 'One frozen trackless smile,' when love does not live up to expectation. In 'North Labrador,' the poet questions a lover against 'A land of leaning ice,': 'Has no one come here to win you, / Or left you with the faintest blush, / Upon your glittering breasts? / Have you no memories, O Darkly Bright?' 'Darkly Bright' has become Pocahontas in The Bridge, that brightness transferred to the promise that she offers: 'O Princess whose brown lap was virgin May; / And bridal flanks and eyes hid tawny pride.' 'Tawny' also reminds us that Pocahontas has evolved from the 'Ochreous and lynx-barred' imagery of 'The River.'

Secondly, Crane asks; 'Whose burnished hands / With mineral wariness found out the stone / Where prayers, forgotten streamed the mesa sands?' The hands belong to the 'winter king' but recall the 'divine hand' of 'Ave Maria'. The winter-king, who 'holds the twilight's dim, perpetual throne,' is the symbol of night and the dormant season yet without him, the pattern is disrupted and there will be no harvest. The 'autumn drouth' and the 'burnished hands' extend the image of the 'swift red flesh,' but while they describe drought, the verb 'streamed' promises recovery. Crane's poem, in

many ways, reacts against Eliot's poem, The Waste Land; the poet has tried to create a positive statement to counteract the negativity of Eliot's waterless world in 'The Burial of the Dead,' where its 'red rock' promises nothing:

> What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
> Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,
> You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
> A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,
> And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,
> And the dry stone no sound of water. Only
> There is shadow under this red rock. (19-25)[67]

Crane has also sought out 'the stone' which represents 'The old gods of the rain [who] lie wrapped in pools.' It is they whose 'Mythical brows' we see 'retiring—loth, / Disturbed and destined, into denser green.' The consonance of this line slows down its reading as if Crane must take breath before entering the door to the past, to which his desire and his quest have led him. This doorway is symbolized by the ellipsis which divides the poet's musing thoughts in the present from his imagined experience of the past.

Crane recreates this past by setting his scene out like a play, 'There was a bed of leaves, and broken play.' The past tense fixes the time while the natural images assert the connection between Pocahontas and the land. The marginal gloss explicates, elaborating upon the idea of the dream becoming

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[67] Eliot, CP.

reality. The reference in the gloss to 'your blood remembering its first invasion of her secrecy' connects the dream-vision of 'The Harbour Dawn,' and 'The River,' where the poet dreamed of Pocahontas, in 'O Nights that brought me to her body bare.' In The Bridge, Crane is the guardian of memory, seeking it out and attempting to restore it by assimilating the experience of others. The poet effects this move back into the past by giving himself up to it: 'I / Drifted how many hours I never knew,' and by opening himself up to the experience: 'I learned to catch the trout's moon whisper.' Pocahontas is the moon goddess here, finally completing the suggestion in 'The Harbor Dawn' where the mistletoe of 'the mistletoe of dreams' refers to the goddess's golden bough.[68] Crane's language imitates the secretive and elusive nature of his quest in 'the trout's moon whisper.' Pocahontas is described in lunar terms: 'Your hair's keen crescent running,' has evolved from 'the Moor's flung scimitar' in 'Ave Maria.' The mini-rite of renewal that Crane witnesses in the waxing and waning of the moon spurs him onwards to believe that he is the one who can revive Pocahontas with a new Rite of Spring.

Yet before the fertility of the earth can be renewed, and the next section of the poem conceived, Crane must prove the failure that needs correction. Metaphorically, this year's harvest is in danger. Pocahontas is the veiled bride whose virginity remains despite the winter king's attempts played out upon the 'bed of leaves, and broken play.' The poet believes that only he

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[68] According to James Frazer in The Golden Bough, mistletoe is the golden bough associated with Diana, who was the moon-goddess and 'may be described as a goddess of nature in general and of fertility in particular.' 139-146.

can put right the yearly ritual, and, in doing so, put right his own age. Wolf suggests that this bed of leaves is the marriage bed, disturbed by death and the interruption of the life cycle.[69] The references work in this way but the leaves are also a metaphor for the history of man, ultimately to the Garden of Eden and the first 'broken play.' In addition, the bed of leaves represents the poem and its creation; if Crane can put right the world of the poem, he can successfully complete his imaginative creation.

Determined in his quest and task, Crane journeys onwards: 'I left my sleek boat nibbling margin grass...' The imagery of the boat bobbing against the riverbank is a continuation of the connection that Crane makes between the Indian peoples and horses, just as 'Neighing canyon' also picks up from the horse imagery of 'The River.' The ellipsis again marks a division; this time it signals the change between the poet 'learning' the past and the poet pursuing his dream. As the poet leaves the water which had teased him lovingly for his ardour, images of the moon and laughing waters recall the sea of 'Voyages II' where 'Her vast undinal belly moonwards bends, / Laughing the wrapt inflections of our love. This contrasting echo reinforces the sterility of this poem at this point, further emphasized by Crane's use of a metaphor that merges sunrise with the unfertilized but immortal Pocahontas star that 'bled into the dawn.' By transforming into 'one star, swinging,' Pocahontas can entice the poet onwards, as she did in 'The Harbor Dawn.'

The poet has survived his first 'dark night of the soul'; the star both draws him on and illuminates his path as he climbs towards her although she

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[69] Wolf 71.

always remains above him to guide his quest. It is significant that the poet climbs towards her; Northrop Frye, in his essay 'The Survival of Eros in Poetry' relates such a concept to the Bible:

> The third or 'fallen' world is the one we are born into, and animals and plants seem to be relatively well adjusted to it, but man is not. His natural world is the perfect world God originally created for him and intended him to live in. Nothing remains of this place physically except the stars in their courses, along with the legends concerning the stars, that they are made of quintessence, that they move in perfect circles about the earth, that they give out an inaudible music. Otherwise, the original home of man is no longer a place, but may to some degree be achieved as a state of mind. Man's primary duty, in fact, is to move upward on the scale of being, coming as close to his original state as possible. [70]

Crane's use of 'the logic of metaphor' implicitly reinterprets such concepts to serve his own purpose: the vision of the poet struggling to attain the goal of his imagination. The insubstantial figure of Pocahontas is still dancing ahead of Crane as he glimpses her within the scenery of the American wilderness: 'Feet nozzled wat'ry webs of upper flows; / One white veil gusted from the very top.' The white veil is an extension of the image of the virgin bride,

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[70] Frye, Myth 45.

which, at the same time, connects the phantom figure to the physical features of the waterfall. The poet further merges Pocahontas into the land by recognizing her provocative smile within the mountain ranges of the Appalachians which look towards the Adirondacks. He describes it thus: 'Steep, inaccessible smile that eastward bends / And northward reaches in that violet wedge / Of Adirondacks!—wisped of azure wands.'

This effect underlines the image of Pocahontas as America, but the emphasis on 'eastwards' followed by 'northward' makes a spiral staircase of the climb. Ascending a spiral staircase is a metaphor for seeking truth. Frye writes: 'The immense suggestiveness of the spiral climb up the mountain may be connected with the fact that each revolution on the spiral is circumferential: that is, one acquires a complete vision or understanding of what one is doing at each stage.'[71] He cites John Donne's words on truth in 'Satire 3' to illustrate his point:

> On a huge hill
> Cragg'd, and steep, Truth stands, and he that will
> Reach her, about must, and about must go;
> And what the hill's suddenness resists, win so.

Although the quest is Crane's, his language and imagery rework a passage from Tennyson:

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[71] Frye, Myth 218.

One rear'd a font of stone
And drew, from butts of water on the slope,
The fountain of the moment, playing, now
A twisted snake, and now a rain of pearls,
Or steep-up spout whereon the golden ball
Danced like a wisp; and somewhat lower down
A man with knobs and wires and vials fired
A cannon; Echo answer'd in her sleep
From hollow fields; and here were telescopes
For azure views. (Prologue, 59-68)[72]

Tennyson's cannon becomes Crane's storm as dream-like, the poet watches himself pursuing Pocahontas: 'Over how many bluffs, tarns, streams I sped! / And knew myself within some boding shade.' The 'boding shade' is that of Maquokeeta, who '*haunts the lakes and hills.*' Like Crane's figuration of Pocahontas, Maquokeeta is assimilated into the physical descriptions of the poem. The pun on the ghostly shade prepares for the darkened skies of the coming storm, which, as it breaks, integrates with the beating of tom-toms. Crane's thunder is not 'dry sterile thunder without rain' like Eliot's in 'What the Thunder Said.' This thunder beats and ascends in its rhythm until it explodes in sexual imagery: 'That blanket of the skies: the padded foot / Within,—I heard it; 'til its rhythm drew / -Siphoned the black pool from the heart's hot root!' Giles reads this as 'this section's familiar one of the drawing off of bad

[72] Tennyson, SE.

blood.'[73] However, black is the colour Crane associates with an overwhelming sexual experience. In 'Voyages III' he is compelled by the same sort of drive: 'And so, admitted through black swollen gates / That must arrest all distance otherwise.' In 'Repose of Rivers' 'the black gorge,' is a treasure for bartering but it seems that all of the poet's past sexual experiences converge in 'The Dance' where sexuality and darkness are mutually dependent. Their motivating influence and the rapture of 'The Dance' connotes 'the rapturous and explosive destructivism of Rimbaud'[74] through allusions to 'Le Bateau ivre.'[75] Crane admired Rimbaud's imaginative daring and linguistic resourcefulness, but Bloom makes greater claims:

> Rimbaud, heir of both Hugo and Baudelaire, was potentially a stronger poet than either, just as Hart Crane, influenced by Eliot and Stevens, possessed poetic gifts that could have transcended the work of both precursors. Crane's identification with Rimbaud takes on a particular poignancy in this context, reminding us of imaginative losses as great as those involved in the early deaths of Shelley and Keats.[76]

While the poem compares more easily to 'Voyages' its influence can still be detected in Crane's quest through The Bridge. Bloom argues that '"Le bateau

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[73] Giles 166.

[74] LHC 260.

[75] Rimbaud, CP.

[76] Bloom, Rimbaud 1.

ivre" does not relate a voyage that has taken place and ended in disaster; *it foretells that same voyage*.'[77] Crane's long poems work in the same way; the poet gazing outwards, enacting his internalised quest over and over.

Rimbaud's journey, like Crane's, is described in detail; both are literal and metaphorical journeys. There are also linguistic similarities. The language of 'Atlantis' begins in a translation of Rimbaud's verse:

> From that time on, I bathed in the Poem
> Of the Sea, lactescent and steeped in stars,
> Devouring green azures. ('Le bateau ivre,' 21-24)

In the eighty-fifth line, Rimbaud claims that he has seen 'sidereal archipelagoes' ('J'ai vu des archipels sidéraux!')[78]. In 'Atlantis' Crane describes the 'orphic strings' of the bridge as 'Sidereal phalanxes.' Crane's quest ends in imposed triumph while Rimbaud is defeated in the twenty-fourth stanza:

> Un enfant accroupi plein de tristesses, lâche
> Un bateau frêle comme un papillon de mai.[79]

In a footnote Cohn declares of this verse:

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[77] Bloom, Rimbaud 138.

[78] Rimbaud, CP.

[79] Rimbaud, CP.

> This is the moment of defeat turning the gaze inward to intimate depth: to the 'little fish in the little pond.' In 'Little Gidding' T.S. Eliot similarly pokes with a stick at a crab (like the ragged one he says should have been in 'Prufrock') in a pool on a mountain path. No doubt he had read his Rimbaud.[80]

Eliot poking with a stick recalls Crane, in 'Van Winkle' poking at the snakes, but while Crane has similar moments of 'gazing inward,' he also gazes outward toward his bridge, the symbol of paradise in The Bridge.

'Le Bateau ivre' contains images of Indians and storm which suggest primitive passions, but in 'The Dance,' the thunder becomes the Indian dance as the frenzied activity whirls the air: 'A cyclone threshes in the turbine crest, / Swooping in eagle feathers down your back.' The frantic choreography of the dance incorporates all the Indian images of 'The River'; 'Papooses crying on the wind's long mane / Screamed redskin dynasties that fled the brain,' and eagle feathers: 'And space, an eaglet's wing, laid on her hair.' Though Crane makes the stanza a whirl of pounding feet and the fury of the storm breaking over the earth, he preserves the sense that this is a ceremony. Not only does 'A birch kneel,' but the words imply that this is a ritual: 'Know, Maquokeeta, greeting; know death's best / —Fall, Sachem, strictly as the tamarack!'

The boundaries between the dance and the sexual act start to dissolve as Crane urges the chief onwards against the background of the moaning

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[80] Cohn 171, footnote 16.

Pocahontas, demanding the solo dance as tribute: 'The long moan of a dance is in the sky. / Dance, Maquokeeta: Pocahontas grieves...' The pace of the stanza is stretched by the multi-consonants of the Indian names then snaps back into the image of the next stanza, as 'every tendon scurries towards the twangs / Of lightning deltaed down your saber hair.' Images rush at the reader; Maquokeeta's leaping headdress is one with the lightening forks; both are likened to a predatory animal when Indian and fire unite: 'Now snaps the flint in every tooth; red fangs / And splay tongues thinly busy the blue air...' Maquokeeta, earlier associated with 'the twilight's dim, perpetual throne,' emerges as the snake of 'Van Winkle,' the 'snake that lives before.' The Indian chief has become Crane's symbol of transition, moving between the seasons and the poem sections, and shedding each like a skin. Frye understands transformation as the purpose of quest, 'The genuine quest-cycle is of the type in which the conclusion is the starting point renewed and transformed by the quest itself.'[81] Crane's renewal is described through the seasonal changes that are part of the life and death cycle so that 'Sprout, horn!' is an image of triumphant metamorphosis as well as sexuality.

'Sprout, horn,' paired with 'Spark, tooth,' is also an invocation. As the poet commands his *alter-ego,* Maquokeeta, to 'relent, restore,' alliteration promotes the ceremonial aspect, as if Crane is reciting ritual words to arouse his listeners as well as himself. The poet demands re-assurance from the ceremony, 'Lie to us,—dance us back the tribal morn!' The appeal is a rhetorical device; it is the imagination, personified by the Medicine-man, which

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[81] Frye, Myth 214.

transports the poet and reader to 'The Dance.' Winters, in his review of The Bridge, castigated this line as a manoeuvre to compensate for 'the inadequacy of belief'[82] yet the line is a mini-summary of the ethos of The Bridge.[83] Winters understands Crane's goals as voids which the poet must fill:

> And in 'The Dance' and in 'Atlantis' respectively, he goes to the end. But his end is not an end in either case: it is a void. He does not discover this fact himself, but the passion and the linguistic precision with which he endeavors to render his delusion make it impossible, I think, that we should fail to recognize his delusion for what it is.[84]

Crane does not discover voids at the end of his quests; they are everywhere throughout, but most visible when the poet examines the contemporary world. Perhaps we do recognize the delusion, but suppress our perception as we follow the poet knowing that while Crane wants to return to a metaphysical 'tribal morn,' he acknowledges the unfeasibility of such a desire through 'Lie to us' while still bravely attempting to realize his vision.

While 'The Dance' evokes the powers that govern fertility, only sacrifice can renew them; in the same way, Crane creates poetry to create the world anew, whatever the cost. Brunner too recognizes 'The Dance' as:

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[82] Yvor Winters, In Defence of Reason (London: Routledge,1960) 598.

[83] Tate, Revolutionary 37. He ironically calls this line 'probably the perfect word of romanticism in this century.

[84] Winters 598.

> an analog to poetic creation as Crane experienced it. Writing poetry depends on unleashing demonic, primitive forces and the sacred rite of the poet is to be possessed by forces from beyond and consumed by a power which he has himself conjured up and to which he yields himself as a sacrificial victim. If the bland emoluments of contemporary culture have caused people to forget this ancient, sacred role, Crane will remind one and all that the shaman and the seer and the medicine man are forerunners of the poet.[85]

Identifying with Maquokeeta in 'dance us back the tribal morn' is part of Crane's creative process; as 'Medicine-man,' the poet hopes to renew and restore.

The role of Maquokeeta-Crane is spelled out through the mixing of the fighting and writing terms: the 'spears and assemblies'; the 'yelling battlements', are both sexual and aggressive and are further emphasized by 'black drums thrusting on.' 'Spears,' which will become 'mythic spears' in 'Atlantis' symbolize the poet's pen writing upon 'the bed of leaves.' Emboldened by Maquokeeta's faith as well as his own, Crane openly assumes the role of the male protagonist: 'I, too, was liege / To rainbows currying each pulsant bone: / Surpassed the circumstances, danced out the siege!' The poet's description of pleasure is enhanced by metaphor and

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[85] Brunner 153.

synaesthesia; passion is a 'rainbow' that beats round the poet's body, 'combing' his bones, but it also deprives Crane of free will, ('I, too, was liege'), and it overrides hesitation. This will-depriving passion extends to the watchers: 'I saw more escorts wake— / Flickering, sprint up the hill groins like a tide,' recalling the 'Proem', where 'multitudes, bent toward some flashing scene, never disclosed, but hastened to again' act collectively. These are not 'red sullen faces [that] sneer and snarl,' as in line 344 of 'What the Thunder said'[86], but willing martyrs, akin to Dionysius and St. Sebastian, who glory in their deaths and epitomize the burning of desire: 'I could not pick the arrows from my side. / Wrapped in that fire....' The line also suggests the crucified Christ and reinforces the suggestion that the Maquokeeta poet symbolically dies for mankind as a prelude to resurrection. Paul Friedman, examining the significance of bridges in dreams, extends their symbolic meaning beyond the unitive one: 'This ever recurring theme of sacrifice, which is associated with the bridge motif, plays the central role in innumerable legends and tales in our own culture that deal with bridges spanning rivers or chasms, linking territory to territory. These legends seem to imply acts of defiance which aroused feelings of guilt, thus providing the motivation for sacrificial atonement.'[87]

Friedman's words explain Crane's recurring motive of sacrifice; although the poet completes this act with 'relent, restore,' we understand that this completion is willed upon the poem by the poet and that it disintegrates as

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[86] Eliot, CP.

[87] Paul Friedman, '"The Bridge": A Study in Symbolism,' Psychoanalytic Quarterly 21 (1952): 49-80.

soon as the poet moves beyond these lines. Crane does indeed sacrifice himself gloriously as he watches himself being immolated: 'I heard the hush of lava wrestling your arms, / And stag teeth foam about the raven throat.' This death equates to sexual possession: 'Flame cataracts of heaven in seething swarms / Fed down your anklets to the sunset's moat.' The imagery of rainbows and flames are reworkings of Helen's 'Reflective conversion of all things' in 'For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen,' with a similar emphasis on the throat:

> At your deep blush, when ecstasies thread
> The limbs and belly, when rainbows spread
> Impinging on the throat and sides... (F&H 1, 35-37)

Pocahontas's transformation follows her possession as Crane uses physical love to symbolize the power of the imagination to create and change:

> I saw thy change begun!
>
> And saw thee dive to kiss that destiny
> Like one white meteor, sacrosanct and blent
> At last with all that's consummate and free
> There, where the first and last gods keep thy tent. (Dan, 76-80)

The dive in 'The Dance' is a dive into death, but the kiss is a release into destiny. Crane has re-stated the rules of 'Voyages III': 'And where death, if

shed, / Presumes no carnage, but this single change,— / Upon the steep floor flung from dawn to dawn / The silken skilled transmemberment of song.' To emphasize that this is the turning point of the poem, the poet adds other changes. The chameleon-like 'lizard in the furious noon' sheds his legs ('casts his pelt') and his colour to become 'pure serpent.' Again the Garden of Eden is implicated. The change affects the poet too; he returns to the sidelines of the poem signalling his retreat from Maquokeeta, and his return to the role of observer through his use of personal pronouns, 'Time itself, and moon / Of his own fate, I saw thy change begun!'

After this frenzied action, Crane leaves that part of the poem, marking his departure with ellipsis and returning to the present where he can contemplate the result of what he has experienced, imaginatively. Maquokeeta is restored to '*the shade that haunts the lakes and hills.*' He is once more part of nature, both 'Thewed of the levin,' and 'thunder-shod and lean.' The earth is restored as 'thy bride immortal in the maize!' Death has renewed the earth and reassured the poet for 'Thy freedom is her largesse, Prince, and hid / On paths thou knowest best to claim her by.'

Crane uses his imaginative foray into the past to assess its legacy for the present. The earth is still fecund:

> Her hair's warm sibilance. Her breasts are fanned
> O stream by slope and vineyard—into bloom! (Dan, 95-6)

Pocahontas still represents the physical earth, full of promise: 'She is the torrent and the singing tree, / And she is virgin to the last of men...'

Maquokeeta is gone with his warriors to the reservations but the past tense both mourns and celebrates the Spring: 'We danced, O Brave, we danced beyond their farms, / In cobalt desert closures made our views...' In opposition, Combs reads the line thus, 'the transfigured soul of the Indian chief is presented as having achieved new freedom and insight.'[88] I cannot agree; rather than achieving such freedom himself, Maquokeeta is granted it, proved in line eighty-seven where Crane states, 'Thy freedom is her largesse, Prince.' More importantly, Combs compares Maquokeeta to Faustus: 'Like Faustus he grasps the paradox that to possess the world is to lose it.' Crane has re-created the world but the moment of possession is immediately over. The poem, which began with questions, ends with a series of them: 'Do arrows thirst and leap? Do antlers shine / Alert, star-triggered in the listening vault / Of dusk? —And are her perfect brows to thine?' Their effect is to add an air of inevitability, to reinforce that Crane's poem acknowledges that each experience is part of a repeating pattern.

Hazo sums up the gulf between the two cultures as too severe to use as a springboard to unite man and nature in the present, [89] yet the dream of uniting man with nature or heaven with earth leads us back to the basic premise of The Bridge itself. Crane has articulated Maquokeeta's sacrifice by becoming Maquokeeta; both are rewarded by the vision of the blooming Pocahontas-earth figure. The dance which reversed time in 'dance us back the tribal morn,' is over and back in the past while this part of Crane's journey:

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[88] Combs 134.

[89] Hazo 93.

'West, west and south,' is completed. The poem also answers the question posed by the gloss in 'The Harbor Dawn,' '*with whom*?' Jared Gardner helpfully illuminates the purpose of that question: 'Although the question allows for the assumption that it is to be Pocahontas herself, in this myth she functions not as the lover but as the intercessor, taking the poet back to the site of that original encounter with her own body as the bridge between the sundered pair.'[90] In effect, Pocahontas is the mediator between the poet and his vision. The quest must continue.

5 'Indiana'

The major difficulty facing Crane after the drama of 'The Dance,' is that of moving the poem onwards without an anti-climax, while at the same time preserving the mood of reconciliation. That poem ended with a sense of resolve; yet the ellipsis and past tense imply that 'The Dance' remains an interlude, separate from the main task of The Bridge, 'We danced, O brave, we danced beyond their farms, / In cobalt desert closures made our views...' The remaining two lines make an affirmative declaration that concludes 'The Dance', but their declarative intent separates rather than leads this ending into the next poem: 'Now Is the strong prayer folded in thine arms, / The serpent with the eagle in the boughs.' Giles disagrees, arguing that analogies join the two poems:

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[90] Jared Gardner, '"Our Native Clay": Racial and Sexual Identity and the Making of Americans in The Bridge,' American Quarterly 44 (1992): 24-50.

> What we have here is a thread of analogies which bridge the two poems. The 'wiry *vine*' in 'Indiana' takes up 'slope and *vineyard*' in 'The Dance.' '*Closes*' ('Indiana') echoes 'desert *closures*.' The '*dusk*' ('Indiana') mirrors 'the listening vault / Of *dusk*.' And 'furls in its *song*' ('Indiana') takes up the previous '*singing* tree.'[91]

However, 'The Dance' remains an example, rather than a solution, so that the poem can continue. To circumvent this problem, the poet transfers the setting of the poem to Indiana, via Colorado, allowing Crane to contrast his Indian idyll with the gold rush that sets in motion America's 'fall from grace.'

'Indiana' is the last section to be set in the past, but Crane makes no claims for this bygone time. Instead, the poet usurps the functions of 'The Dance' and reproduces them, in a distorted form. 'Indiana' is a lament, a recognition that the past cannot reprieve the present; its sadness echoes that of Whitman in 'When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd':

> When lilacs last in the dooryard bloom'd,
> And the great star early droop'd in the western sky in the night,
> I mourn'd, and yet shall mourn with ever-returning spring.
>
> Ever-returning spring, trinity sure to me you bring,
> Lilac blooming perennial and drooping star in the west,
> And thought of him I love. (1-6)

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[91] Giles 11.

Crane intimates this through the parallels of sorrow about infertility, carried over from 'The Dance,' and the woman's grief for her son. The obsession with the earth's fertility disintegrates into the sterility of the pioneer woman: 'And bison thunder rends my dreams no more / As once my womb was torn, my boy, when you / Yielded your first cry at the prairie's door...' The pioneer mother's anxiety about her son relates to Crane's anxiety about his own world. Her appeal to her son to return to the land reveals both her fear for her son and Crane's anxiety about the contemporary world while her remonstrating words to her son, 'But you who drop the scythe to grasp the oar / Knew not, nor heard,' are an ironic parody of the language of Columbus in 'Ave Maria':

> For I have seen now what no perjured breath
> Of clown nor sage can riddle or gainsay;—
> To you, too, Juan Perez, whose counsel fear
> And greed adjourned,—I bring you back Cathay! (AM, 5-8)

The woman, like the others caught up in the Goldrush, sought Eldorado and failed; experience rather than counsel has 'adjourned greed.'

She also resists being categorized. The pioneer woman is either simple and 'folksy,' or monumentally selfish. Brunner describes the poem thus:

> 'Indiana' seems innocent enough and it connects up so clearly with so many significant strands in the final version of The Bridge that it seems ready-made for extended exegesis. And

> yet from the moment of its appearance, the poem has provoked the most violent reactions, almost all of them negative. The reason may be that this poem contains a viper.[92]

Vipers are a constant presence in the poems of The Bridge. Here, the viper takes the form of a worm of discontent poisoning the mother's personality, which, like the poem, is elusive. The poem is usually read in one of two ways; that of a manipulative mother, trying to coerce her son, or as a sympathetic account that tells her story, as if from her own lips. Brunner sums up one view of her: 'The surface of this poem is so innocent that the shock of discovering that this mother is a frightening personality is unnerving, and it may explain why this poem provokes such violent responses from even the most benign of commentators.'[93] Or, a contrasting view, it is not the pioneer woman who is frightening but the disintegrating values of the world that she inhabits. The poem has to be deliberately sentimental because it seeks to portray the thoughts of an Indiana farmer's wife. It needs to appear to be written from a 'homespun' and 'folktale' viewpoint to make it seem authentic; Crane accomplishes this with such phrases as 'Whose folks, like mine, came out of Arrowhead.' To elaborate this effect, the poem is written in quatrains with alternate lines rhyming, and in the style of a dramatic monologue. The second and fourth lines are indented. Visually, it looks like a ballad, while its tale is told in a folksong manner. Crane begins the poem with a metaphor of a

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[92] Brunner 226-27.

[93] Brunner 228.

flower opening and closing. 'Morning glory' is an ironic reference to the promise of 'The Harbor Dawn' but the irony is lost in the platitudes that follow. The pioneer woman's 'day' is almost over; it 'furls in its song.' The metaphor of the flower and life is a deliberately clichéd one, allowing Crane to stress that the speaker is unsophisticated in her needs. She wants her son to remain with her and is trying to persuade him to stay, by reminding him that he is 'all that's left to me of Jim' (line 46), and 'you're the only one with eyes like him' (line50).

Crane must present the speaker's simplicity as well as commenting on it within the same piece of writing. The obvious metaphors, the undemanding rhyming scheme and the short regular stanzas all promote these assumptions. The uncertainty about her motives deconstructs the triumph of 'The Dance' and undermines the assurance displayed by the poet in the previous poem; it would seem that the ambiguity is deliberate. Crane emphasizes the destructive effect of an obsession with gold by distorting other poetic references, especially Blake's 'The Clod and the Pebble'. 'The pebbles sang' recalls 'a pebble of the brook, / Warbled out those metres meet.'[94] The pebble in Blake's poem is self-serving, extending from the greed of the prospectors, who proclaim, 'We found God lavish there in Colorado / But passing sly.' The pebbles also recall indirectly the 'humpty-dumpty clods' of 'The River.' The firecat, or cougar, 'bristled in the way'[95] in Stevens's 'Earthy Anecdote,' but here the firecat has 'slunk away.' For Crane's prospectors,

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[94] Blake, CP.

[95] Stevens, CP.

even the pebbles sing of the dream of gold, and God is reduced to those terms: 'In golden syllables loosed from the clay / His gleaming mane.' Crane's pioneer woman can only build 'a Hell in Heaven's despite.'

More subtly, the poem is set at the beginning of 'The Gilded Age,' generally considered to be approximately 1865-1900.[96] The 'gilded promises' herald 'The Gilded Age' of a more worldly society, typified by Edith Wharton's novels. The beginnings of this age are present in the reversal of roles; the white woman, although defeated in the search for gold, is travelling east to settle in former Indian territory while the dispossessed squaw is 'Bent westward.' The 'violet haze' of the squaw's eyes is all that remains of 'that violet wedge / Of Adirondacks' in 'The Dance.' Crane places the poem after the end of the Gold Rush, in 1859, as the frontier is closing. The tale of the elderly pioneer woman, set against the background of America's obsession with gold, is the example that connects the downward movement to gold. The mother's bitterness results from her own wasted dreams. Crane, speaking through her, admits that these dreams were false, yielding nothing but 'gilded promise' and 'barren tears.' Her 'barren tears' connect her to Pocahontas before the ritual dance; once again the rites of 'The Dance' have failed. As always in Crane, ecstasy has been momentary and is destroyed before it can be possessed. 'Indiana' is a return to reality after the imaginative possibilities of 'The Dance,' but its flatness deliberately works to strip the latter poem of

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[96] This was a phrase coined by Mark Twain for an era marked by ostentatious materialism and governmental corruption; a time when wilderness estates were built in the Adirondacks for wealthy American aristocrats.

any straightforward possibility of imaginative redemption.

The return eastward signals the end of the pioneer tradition as well as symbolizing the end of this part of the poet's own version of Columbus's quest. Uroff takes a harsher view of the mother's actions; reading the son's departure from the mother as an appropriate conclusion to these five poems, 'Her lament is for the lost promises of her youth, the gold of her westward trek, and, as such, it blends with the wailing of women from time immemorial who have bemoaned the failure of fertility and the dearth of the land.'[97] Despite this, Combs still finds the character a positive one:

> Her affirmative (but not optimistic) frame of mind is possible because of the reinterpretation of her experience after the total failure of her dream.[98]

Like Crane, she has seen her dream disintegrate so, as Combs states, 'her triumph had to take place through loss, not in spite of it.'[99] As Crane's quest is also built upon loss, the poet seems to have created a warning for himself. For the poet who wants to build 'a Heaven in Hell's despite,' she is an example not to follow. In this sense, the pioneer woman frightens the poet and denies him voice so that 'all our silent men' echoes the silence of the poet. Her lament parallels Crane's for his vision, glimpsed in 'The Dance' but

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[97] Uroff 107.

[98] Combs 135.

[99] Combs 135.

now gone. Apart from the pioneer woman, only gold, 'in golden syllables', is allowed to speak. Crane, at least here, is afraid for his vision.

By making the speaker female, the nature-symbolism of Pocahontas is continued and, by presenting the image of an old woman, there is a natural closing to 'Powhatan's Daughter.' The female protagonists have acted as bridge symbols throughout the poem; the male poet-protagonist crosses them in pursuit of his ideal. Now, with the pause for Crane to reassess his quest, the journey seems to stop; the only movement is backwards into memory like the retreat in 'Van Winkle.' The triumphant reconstruction of 'the Dance' has gone. There is no poet-protagonist to witness and report directly on his quest; the poet remains silent while the old woman laments her life, promoting the assumption that the poet too, is lamenting. It is as if he is distancing himself from the poem, unlike 'The Dance' where he hurled himself into the poem to mate with Pocahontas. In order for The Bridge to move forward, Crane must recover from the loss of 'The Dance' and find a solution beyond 'Indiana.' This solution, suggested through Larry's desire to leave the farm and seek adventure, entails Crane leaving the past and confronting, head on, the machine world of 'Cape Hatteras.' On the analogous level, America too, needs a 'fresh start,' one that would encompass the machine alongside a more natural order.

The other connection that the old woman must represent is that of religion. The poem spans the distance between the Indian vegetation rites and Christianity by finding similarities. The trinity of 'Jim,' 'Larry,' and 'Ned,' recalls the trinity of 'Sheriff, Brakeman, and Authority,' as well as the Holy Trinity. Within 'The Dance,' the 'father,' Maquokeeta, has to die to ensure

new life while Christianity preaches that Jesus Christ died to redeem humanity. This is further emphasized by the allusion to the Crucifixion's 'crown of thorns' through 'It had no charter but a promised crown / Of claims to make.' In contrast, the pioneer woman's husband has died pointlessly, 'Back on the gold trail.' Crane's difficulty is that she must also represent Crane's stance at this point in The Bridge. The compromise between 'God / gold' in 'We found God lavish there in Colorado' is the pivot between true value (in a spiritual sense) and the 'gilded promise' of fool's gold. 'Gold' is usually a symbol of promise in Crane but here it is perverted into a symbol of greed. The Bridge is full of golden images: the 'Hushed gleaming fields' of 'Ave Maria,' the 'Two—three bright window-eyes aglitter, disc / The sun,' of 'The Harbor Dawn,' the 'gold arpeggios' of 'Van Winkle,' the 'undertowed sunlight' and the 'mustard glow' of 'The River,' and the 'Flame cataracts of heaven in seething swarms' that 'Fed down your anklets to the sunset's moat,' in 'The Dance.' Crane has used these images to defend himself against his world but here they finally degenerate into the images of a commodity. That spirituality is compromised by gold is evidenced by the gamble of 'Won nothing' and the blasphemous pun of 'His gleaming name.'

Crane makes 'Indiana' the transitional stage between the imagination's triumph in 'The Dance' and the long descent into 'Cape Hatteras' by showing the old woman caught in limbo: 'I'm standing still, I'm old, I'm half of stone!' Although the poem celebrates the temporary shared bond of motherhood between the pioneer woman and the Indian woman, the moment ends as quickly as the resolve in 'The Dance,' as the old woman declares, 'Knew that mere words could not have brought us nearer.' Their fates are very different

and when the speaker says: 'I held you up—I suddenly the bolder' it signifies that the time of the Indian is over and that the star of the settler is in the ascendant. The Indian woman seems to be a daughter of Pocahontas; her eyes are 'like twin stars' and 'their violet haze' connects her to nature. Now, like Crane, her eyes are 'sharp with pain.' The pioneer woman is another seemingly uncomplicated character, like the hoboes of 'The River,' whose instincts might be true - the only gold of worth in 'Indiana' is in 'Oh, hold me in those eyes' engaging blue; / That's where the stubborn years gleam and atone,— / Where gold is true!' The poem is a summary of the first part of The Bridge in that it continues the cycle of exploration, showing each generation setting out on a quest for riches and adventure, and a glimpse of the vision that guides the quest. The Gold Rush has proved a barren quest, but by returning to the river, 'Down the dim turnpike to the river's edge— / Perhaps I'll hear the mare's hoofs to the ford...,' the quest is renewed where Crane had first conceived it, on the '*Terrific threshold of the prophet's pledge.*' The pioneer woman has become the poet's conscience, her words to her son are also the poet's to himself: 'you'll keep your pledge; / I know your word!' The poet allows us a little hope within the connection of the mare's hoofs and the 'neighing canyons' of 'The Dance', but this hope is immediately dashed by Crane's doubts about his ability to fulfil his quest: 'Or will you be a ranger to the end?' The closing appeal is reminiscent of Eliot's lines in 'The Game of Chess'[100]:

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[100] Eliot, CP.

HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME

HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME

Goonight Bill. Goonight Lou. Goonight May. Goonight.

(168-170)

'Come back to Indiana—not too late' also echoes the final words of 'Van Winkle' ('And hurry along, Van Winkle—it's getting late!'). Berthoff believes that the poem's 'direct closing appeal for her boy's return structurally anticipates the reversed appeal, the poet's appeal to his spiritual predecessor Whitman, which will end the long "Cape Hatteras" section, soon to follow.'[101] Berthoff is correct in describing the format of the appeals, but the appeal is also the descending staircase into 'Cape Hatteras.' The other request, that for the inherent spiritual knowledge of 'The Dance,' is passed onto the pioneer woman's son through the eyes compared to 'twin stars' of the homeless squaw. 'Not too late' is significant because it offers hope even as the words trail away, symbolizing the distance that Larry and the poet put between themselves and 'Indiana.'

[101] Berthoff 104.

Chapter 5

'Cutty Sark,' 'Cape Hatteras,' and 'Three Songs.'

'I started walking home across the Bridge...' (CS, 58)

Crane's 'Cutty Sark' begins a new section after the emotional upheavals of 'Powhatan's Daughter,' but the past still influences the poem. A pining for a more adventurous long-ago is implied by the epigraph, the last two lines from Melville's poem 'The Temeraire,' yet it is the sadness of 'Indiana's' lament that lingers on within the first part of the poem. The chronological order of The Bridge suggests that the drunken sailor may be an older version of Larry in 'Indiana.' To correspond to the changes of time and place, Crane alters his style from the rhyming quatrains of 'Indiana' to an uneven visual structure without rhyme. This style must accommodate the shambling sailor and the poet's reaction to him; as in the other poems, major characters are used to parallel the less than clear-cut nature of Crane's own quest. While the poet strives to both make sense of the sailor's words and wrest some hope from his experience, he must also expand the poem beyond the sailor's account and his reaction to it, in order to provide the capacity for the vision that marks the turn of The Bridge.

Crane places 'Cutty Sark' in its own section to emphasize its importance as the transitional point between past and present and the metaphorical bridge between 'reality' and imagination. In this poem, Crane finally makes his stand and openly proclaims the importance of the imagination, enacted through a vision of the tea clippers. Despite the

fortifying experience of 'The River' and 'The Dance,' the poet's journey through the past ended in ambiguity in 'Indiana.' In order to remove himself from this impasse, Crane re-establishes the poem in the present. The text is divided into two parts, highlighting Crane's desire to reconcile oppositions. The first part of the poem sets Crane in 'South Street' but while the setting is contemporary, the lines constantly refer to earlier sections of The Bridge as if the poet were gathering in various skeins that make up the poem. To further this effect, the chorus constantly refers to 'weaving.' This 'motif' prepares for 'Cape Hatteras' where Crane will try to incorporate the machine into poetry:

> New verities, new inklings in the velvet hummed
> O dynamos, where hearing's leash is strummed...
> Power's script,—wound, bobbin-bound, refined—
> Is stropped to the slap of belts on booming spools. (CH, 67-70)

Giles understands that 'This series of weaving images is testimony to Crane's belief in how twentieth-century technology is essentially no more than a reincarnation of more primitive machines. The puns are the bridge between antiquated loom and modern factory.'[1] The construction of this 'bridge' begins with Crane reintroducing the contemporary world in 'Cutty Sark' and linguistically anticipating it in his chorus. 'Frontiers,' 'running sands,' 'Atlantis Rose,' the 'wharf truck,' and 'putting the statue of Liberty out' serve as reminders of the preceding journey that also forms part of this 'bridge.' This technique of reiterating memories makes 'Cutty Sark' an assessment of the

[1] Giles 12.

quest so far; it emboldens the poet to begin 'walking home across the Bridge...' The memories act as a catalyst, spurring on the poet to find vision in the latter part of the poem.

Before Crane can assert his vision, he must evaluate the befuddled experiences of the sailor who can be traced back, through 'the nugget's wake' to 'Indiana': 'A dream called Eldorado was his town, / It rose up shambling in the nugget's wake.' Through allusion, the drunken sailor is associated with Captain Ahab: 'Murmurs of Leviathon he spoke, / and rum was Plato in our heads...' More sinisterly, the allusion also invokes Captain Ahab's obsession. Like Ahab, 'Cutty Sark's sailor's madness lies in a separation from reality.

> 'I'm not much good at time any more keep
> weakeyed watches sometimes snooze—' his bony hands
> got to beating time...'A whaler once—
> I ought to keep time and get over it—I'm a
> Democrat—I know what time it is—No
> I don't want to know what time it is—that
> damned white Artic killed my time...' (CS, 18-24)

Ahab's madness is caused by his desire to 'possess' Moby Dick and is demonstrated by his insane pursuit of the whale. Crane's sailor is lost within a jumble of confused impressions; from this disorder, Crane must create enough momentum for his vision.

The poem begins in a deceptively simple manner. The preceding poem, 'Indiana,' with its simple rhyming quatrains and its deliberately clumsy

extra syllables, portrays the 'homespun' philosophy and plain beliefs of Larry's mother. The poem ends on a drawn-out note of longing, trailing across the page in a descending text that mirrors the mother's sorrow. 'Cutty Sark's' first line is also ballad-like: 'I met a man in South Street, tall—,' but the second line has too many syllables to continue the pattern effortlessly, 'a nervous shark tooth swung on his chain.' The seeming simplicity of 'Indiana' is jettisoned in the third line as the poet launches into the shambolic monologue of the deliberately confusing text. The sailor is reduced to a pair of unfocused eyes, peering through glass as he talks to the poet in a bar:

> His eyes pressed through green glass
> —green glasses, or bar lights made them
> so—
> shine—
> GREEN—
> eyes—
> stepped out—forgot to look at you
> or left you several blocks away— (CS, 3-10)

Information is thrown at the reader piecemeal, mimicking the impressions that the poet-listener receives and emphasizing the state of confusion upon which the first part of the poem depends. The imagery repeatedly disintegrates; even when the sailor's eyes reflect the green sea, the broken lines reflect his bewilderment. New impressions replace old ones before they are properly assimilated. The chorus sections, constructed out of lines from the

romantically named song, 'Stamboul Nights,' make disjointed comments on both 'Cutty Sark' and other sections of The Bridge. The first line of the song, '*O Stamboul Rose—dreams weave the rose*!', conjures up the dreaming state of 'The Harbor Dawn' but there, the effect was part of the sense of beginning. Here, with the sailor's mind in disarray, the song works as an epitaph for the sailor's failed sea quest.

Crane needs to learn from the broken sailor's quest, but the sailor's speech deflects Crane's unspoken questions. His language reflects his disordered thoughts and his devastated mind: 'It's *S.S. Ala*—Antwerp—now remember kid / to put me out at three she sails on time.' The sailor's plight is also indicated by the way in which Crane's symbols are distorted. 'Damned white Arctic killed my time' is a reversal of the symbolism of 'whiteness', while vision, which is also symbolic in Crane, is 'weakeyed' here. The sailor's 'blindness' is not on a tragic scale, yet, although he is not Oedipus, he has failed to acknowledge his place within time and, as such, he represents Crane's fears of failure.

The chorus line jumps from 'The Harbor Dawn' to 'The Dance,' as 'dreams' become 'drums,' in '*O Stamboul Rose—drums weave—.*' The line is interrupted to portray the sailor's disordered mind going off on another tangent. Where the poem has travelled through the American past to arrive at the present, the sailor has travelled round the world, seemingly unawed and unimpressed, simply asking: 'have you seen Popocatepetl—birdless mouth / with ashes sifting down—?' In this, he symbolizes Crane's modern world; he cannot make the connection to Columbus's volcano, 'Teneriffe's garnet,' or to

Maquokeeta's sacrifice: 'I heard the hush of lava wrestling in your throat.' It is left to the poet to 'weave the rose' from the fragments of the sailor's speech.

'Weaving the rose,' Crane implies, means re-interpreting visionary possibilities, but the lines subtly undermine this. '*O Stamboul Rose—drums weave*' evokes 'The Dance' where the poet implores, against a background of 'black drums thrusting on,' 'Lie to us.' The allusions to The Tempest, in '*Rose of Stamboul O coral Queen*,' add to this suggestion; Ariel's lines, 'Full fathom five thy father lies. / Of his bones are coral made,'[2] are meant to deceive; Ferdinand's father, Alonso is not dead. The lines stress the unreliability of memory; here they imply that the sailor's memory is deceiving him, but more darkly, they insinuate that the poet might also be deceiving himself. That the poet is aware of the ambiguity is evidenced by his desire to make sense of the sailor's thoughts, the '*teased remnants of the skeletons of cities.*' The poet challenges the disintegrating chorus of '*—green—drums—drown—,*' to issue a command, '*Sing*!' 'Sing' here is a pun on the command to confess, and an ironic call to celebration. The sailor responds and his speech lurches off on another departure from the subject, his language recalling that of Moby Dick: '—that spiracle!' and 'O life's a geyser—beautiful—my lungs—.' The sailor's words betray his madness; he has been destroyed by the sea yet he still asserts, 'No—I can't live on land—!'

Frightened of failure, Crane seeks to find a remnant of what 'Indiana's' mother perceived within her son: 'Oh, hold me in those eyes' engaging blue; / there's where the stubborn years gleam and atone,— / where gold is true!' Crane's imagination must find some possibility within the chaos: 'I saw the

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[2] The Tempest 1. 2. 399-400.

frontiers gleaming of his mind; / or are there frontiers—running sands sometimes / running sands—somewhere—sands running...' Despite the connection of 'Frontiers' to the failed boundaries of 'Indiana,' Crane's use of one of his own symbolic words, 'gleaming,'[3] successfully imposes the transformative power of the poet's imagination upon the poem. This act of will cannot free Crane from the sailor's doubts but it provides the signal for change within the poem, implied in the line, 'Or they may start some white machine that sings.'

The chorus begins the poem's anticipation of The Bridge's finale, 'Atlantis':

> *ATLANTIS ROSE drums wreathe the rose,*
> *the star floats burning in a gulf of tears*
> *And sleep another thousand—* (CS, 46-48)

The chorus is still a rehearsal for 'Atlantis,' the poem cannot yet propose any real celebration. Instead, it offers the promise of a phoenix-like regeneration, in 'the star floats burning in a gulf of tears.' The star of 'The Harbor Dawn' is laid low, but it still 'floats', foretelling the 'floating singer' of 'Atlantis.' The melancholic tone ends and the poem wraps up the scene, 'interminably / long since somebody's nickel—stopped— / playing—' as the poet leaves behind the bar and the failure that permeates it and moves forward to the next part of The Bridge.

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[3] Hilton and Elaine Landry, A Concordance to the Poems of Hart Crane (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow P, 1973). According to Concordance, used thirteen times throughout Crane's poetry (as gleam or gleaming).

The poem is also returning to familiarity; 'a wharf truck nearly ran him down' is part of the scenery of 'The Harbor Dawn,' but the tone remains distinct from the dreaming/waking imagery of that poem. The dashes prevent a softening of mood as colloquial phrases are rattled out: '—he lunged up Bowery way while the dawn / was putting the Statue of liberty out'; they are both humorous and aggressive as Crane asserts control. In 'The Harbor Dawn' Crane allowed himself to be drawn into the quest; here, the poet is in control and renegotiates the sailor's experience for his own purpose. The beginning of this new stage is signalled by the poet's decision to cross the bridge, the symbol of unity throughout the poem: 'I started walking home across the Bridge...' This turnabout, presented as a realization, marks Crane's determination to succeed. The ellipsis and spacing that follows creates a boundary between the 'real' world and the world of imagination.

The bridge is the catalyst. As Crane looks over its edge, he imagines '*the navies old and oaken.*' The ships are personified as brave and spirited adventurers. Crane's quest, initially unbalanced by the sailor's experience, is validated by his imagined fleet, 'Bright skysails ticketing the Line, wink round the Horn / to Frisco, Melbourne...' Re-energised, his mind plays out the tea race of 1868 when '*Thermopylae, Black Prince, Flying Cloud*' raced against each other. Crane's satisfaction in salvaging his quest is apparent in 'Perennial-*Cutty*-trophied-*Sark*', but the poet's uncertainty, temporarily subdued by his affirmation on the bridge, still lurks within the question marks that drift across the page:

Rainbow, Leander

(last trip a tragedy)—where can you be

Nimbus? and you rivals two—

a long tack keeping—

Taeping?

Ariel? (CS, 80-85)

'Walking home across the Bridge,' is Crane's response to the difficult example of the sailor's journeying. It proves to be a temporary solution. It is a return to Crane's own contemporary world, the world of the Proem, where visions are an escape. As with the visionary moments in the previous poems, the resolution is temporary and the need for quest speedily reasserted. The broken syntax mirrors that at the beginning, implying that Crane's beliefs are as pressurized as the sailor's thoughts. Crane's motivation to continue his quest has fragmented, like the text, under the intensity of the poet's own affirmation. By implication, the vision is too momentary to offer any hope of redemption. The poem deliberately leaves Crane and the reader unarmed and unprepared to face the rigours that await in 'Cape Hatteras.'

2 'Cape Hatteras'

'Cape Hatteras' is the major battleground for Crane's imagination in The Bridge, as the poet struggles to find something of value within his own world. At the end of 'Cutty Sark,' The Bridge's quest is left adrift. The success of the quest has been imagined temporarily within the visionary part of the poem but the poet has been left with no direction to follow. This

concern, allegorized as the weight of the past, slowly forces the opening of 'Cape Hatteras' to fall inwards into a spiritual waste land:

> Imponderable the dinosaur
>
> sinks slow,
>
> the mammoth saurian
>
> ghoul, the eastern
>
> Cape... (CH, 1-5)

The heavy ponderous language slows down the text which lumbers towards an ellipsis. Crane attempts to balance this tension with the upward movement and the softening effect of the 'w's' of the following line:

> While rises in the west the coastwise range,
>
> slowly the hushed land— (CH, 6-7)

This wrestling at the very beginning of this poem signals the battle between body and spirit that will rage through 'Cape Hatteras.'

The poem's beginning conveys the sense of land disappearing into the horizon as it would be seen from a moving ship, perhaps the deck of the 'Santa Maria,' but the recollection of the 'Proem's' vanishing seagull suggests the modern world. The poem implies that the dinosaur of the past is disappearing into time, the words physically imitating a sinking away while the new age dawns, signalled by 'the dorsal change / Of energy.' The land's description is bound up with that of earliest life; the imagery gently elaborates

upon the earlier reference to the primordial dawn in 'The Harbor Dawn,' 'Somewhere out there in blankness steam / Spills into steam, and wanders, washed away.' The appearance of the western cape rising from the water is mimicked by the way the text starts to become dense after the first ellipsis as if rising from the descent at the beginning of the poem. There are suggestions of the birth of a new era, in the 'convulsive shift of sand...,' recalling the streaming 'mesa sands' of 'The Dance' yet this is undermined by the sands of time imagery in 'Cutty Sark': running sands sometimes / running sands—somewhere—sands running...' Crane, confused and intimidated by the primeval and chaotic forces called up by his poem, looks to Whitman for reassurance: 'Or to read to you, Walt,—knowing us in thrall / To that deep wonderment, our native clay.' Rejecting the derelict of 'Cutty Sark,' who is so out of step with time that he is 'not much good at time any more keep / weakeyed watches sometimes snooze—,' Crane aligns himself with those, 'who round the capes, the promontories,' and survive. The travellers of 'Cape Hatteras' savour the details of their journeys after returning home 'to our own / Hearths, there to eat an apple and recall.' Through them, Crane can glimpse his own path:

> But we, who round the capes, the promontories
> Where strange tongues vary messages of surf
> Below grey citadels, repeating to the stars
> The ancient names. (CH, 10-13)

'Grey citadels,' although a reference to antiquity, anticipate the 'white citadels'

that Crane seeks.

The first three stanzas use 'we' and 'our' to proclaim this spiritual brotherhood of poet and travellers, united by their love of their 'native clay':

> Or to read to you, Walt,—knowing us in thrall
>
> To that deep wonderment, our native clay
> Whose depth of red, eternal flesh of Pocahontas—
> Those continental folded aeons, surcharged
> With sweetness below derricks, chimneys, tunnels—
> Is veined by all that time has really pledged us... (17-22)

Yet notwithstanding this emphasis on mutuality, Crane cannot prevent his own fears of exclusion creeping in as his insistent anxiety asserts that he must journey alone. Despite the collective experience, implied by the words, 'what joys or pain / Our eyes can share or answer,' each person is eventually isolated within his own mind, 'Where each sees only his dim past reversed.' Momentary glimpses of something beyond personal experience suggested by the lines; 'while time clears / Our lenses, lifts a focus, resurrects / A periscope,' revive the poet. They are so ephemeral that they leave him unsatisfied. The poem reflects the poet's fears and despair while dramatizing the individual experience as an act of faith, against the background of the cosmos, 'that star-glistered salver of infinity, / The circle, blind crucible of endless space.' Crane presents this infinity as untouchable, 'subjugated

never'; spatially separated from the preceding verse, it stands apart from 'what joys or pain / Our eyes can share or answer.'

Man's reaching for the stars is described in terms of assault; the poet uses the language of war to emphasize that over-reaching has rebounded:

> Now the eagle dominates our days, is jurist
> Of the ambiguous cloud. We know the strident rule
> Of wings imperious. (CH, 37-39)

Humanity counterpoints the cosmos to emphasize the weaknesses of one against the strengths of the other but other oppositions are also in evidence. Laughter and tears, dreams and ambitions, are caught together in 'And we have laughter or more sudden tears. / Dream cancels dream in this new realm of fact.' Space is described in terms of limited perception to emphasize that it cannot be contained; Crane likens it to his other symbol of oppositional unknown, the female. The cosmos, the language implies, is a seductress who cannot be caught:

> Space, instantaneous,
> Flickers a moment, consumes us in its smile:
> A flash over the horizon—shifting gears—
> And we have laughter, or more sudden tears. (CH, 39-42)

Crane is adrift in a present that is not lucid for himself or the reader; to make sense of it the poet incorporates Biblical and mythological references. By

employing their accumulated associations, the poet strengthens the power of his imagery, but the lack of optimism here prevents any comfort in familiarity. 'Hesperus mirrored in the lucid pool' suggests that the evening star is forever captured in the permanent night of the soul. The reference to 'Adam and Adam's answer in the forest,' by recalling the first act of defiance, begins the destructive trail that leads to 'Cape Hatteras' where Man is dominated by the very machines he has created to dominate the earth: 'We know the strident rule / Of wings imperious...'

Crane creates a poem in which imaginative exploration is vital but physical exploration is exploitative. All the poems contain voids which cannot be crossed except by the imagination. Without its potential to span the gap between the known and the unknowable, the imagination withers as 'Dream cancels dream in this new realm of fact,' and life becomes an imitation of life, 'From which we wake into the dream of act.' Man, without imagination, is reduced to 'an atom in a shroud.' In opposition, space exploration is a subverted sexual act, described as 'oilrinsed circles of blind ecstasy!' Man has attempted to penetrate the heavens but cannot possess 'The gleaming cantos of unvanquished space'; this poem has perverted the rituals of 'The Dance.' Flight is masculine with 'taut motors surge' and predatory, with 'space-gnawing.' The plane performs an act of violation as the 'hurtling javelin' attempts to 'splinter space.' Nature is subjugated in the usurped language of Hopkins' poem, 'The Windhover.' The Wright brothers are described as 'windwrestlers' but the line 'Bristle the heights above a screeching gale to hover,' inverts Hopkin's celebratory praise of God to man's blasphemous attempt to rule the skies. Roger Ramsay, quoted in Giles,

claims that '"Crane's master" was Gerard Manley Hopkins, because, like the Jesuit, Crane used words in a "transubstantiative" way which transgresses the boundaries of common logic and so builds bridges between the material and the spiritual.'[4] Crane also uses language to confound; the language of apostrophe in 'O murmurless and shined,' 'O bright circumferences' and 'O thou Dirigible,' is ironic, confusing rather than endorsing meaning as the contrast between the tone of worship and the subject of it puts pressure upon the poem so that words appear to betray their meaning. Crane's hard, metallic language embodies the machine age; it constrains and allows no room for feeling: 'axle-bound, confined / In coiled precision.' From these parts, Crane must construct a metaphorical bridge that will reconcile all of the oppositions in the poem.

Fearing his inability to create this bridge, Crane seeks comfort from Whitman's words in '"Recorders ages hence"—ah, syllables of faith!' Gray believes that it is 'this intense, visionary quality that other American poets of this century have found most seductive, together with Whitman's clear belief that poetry itself is vision, an access to truth.'[5] Though Gray's words admirably sum up why Whitman is central to American poetry, Crane's desire for the sureness of Whitman's vision is initiated by his fears about his own vision; he needs to believe in his own quest as much as Whitman's. For Crane who, even while asserting his belief in the restorative power of the imagination, betrays his doubts, Whitman's fastness of belief is especially appealing.

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[4] Giles 14.

[5] Gray 199.

Crane examines Whitman's way of conciliating differences so that he too, can find a way to 'spiritualize the machine.' In 'Passage to India,' Whitman starts by praising the technological achievements of his day:

> Singing my days,
> Singing the great achievements of the present,
> Singing the strong light work of engineers,
> Our modern wonders, (the antique ponderous Seven
> outvied). (1-4)

These developments do not hinder the poet's imagination from acknowledging the connection between nature and the spirit, as in the fifth part of 'Passage to India':

> O vast Rondure, swimming in space,
> Cover'd all over with visible power and beauty,
> Alternate light and day and the teeming spiritual darkness.
> (81-83)[6]

Crane's age, in contrast, is dwarfed rather than stimulated by the machine that has replaced Pocahontas: 'New verities, new inklings in the velvet hummed / Of dynamos, where hearing's leash is strummed...' The 'New thresholds, new anatomies!' of 'The Wine Menagerie' are reduced to parody and there is no suggestion of those 'New soothings, New amazements,' from 'For the

[6] Whitman, CP.

Marriage of Faustus and Helen.' The exaggeration of Crane's own style emphasizes the perversity of the modern age:

> Power's script,—wound, bobbin-bound, refined—
> Is stropped to the slap of belts on booming spools, spurred
> Into the bulging bouillon, harnessed jelly of the stars.
> Towards what? (CH, 69-72)

The alliteration and repetition of 's' and of 'b' sounds reinforce the repetitive sound of machinery; the metaphors perturb the reader - are they meant to be serious or ridiculous? In effect, they are both, as seen in the comparison between ball-bearings and 'frogs' eyes, giggling in the girth / Of steely gizzards.' The metaphor is visually arresting; it works by grabbing the attention, yet it reveals Crane's fears about the destructive effect of machinery on the imagination. Fearful, lost and adrift, and unable to praise, Crane turns to Whitman and questions him in the style of Whitman's poem, 'Starting from Paumanok':

> Walt, tell me, Walt Whitman, if infinity
> Be still the same as when you walked the beach
> Near Paumanok—your lone patrol—and heard the wraith
> Through surf, its bird note there a long time falling... (CH, 49-52)

Adrift in the uncertainty of his age, Crane calls on Whitman to convince himself that he is the poet described in lines 104-5 of 'Passage to India':

'Finally shall come the poet worthy of that name, / The true son of God shall come singing his songs.'

Brunner reads the change of style in 'Cape Hatteras' as a deliberate attempt by Crane to break free from his own style, 'to demonstrate dramatically how far he is willing to go to move in relation with Whitman: to make his point against isolation, he is prepared to break open his own poem and to include Whitman's language with his own language.'[7] Rather than demonstrating how far Crane will compromise his own vision, Whitman's inclusion serves to accentuate Crane's premise that the modern world is lacking in imagination; a state which supports the necessary agenda for the poet's vision to occur. Text itself characterizes this age; the unrelenting lines of 'Cape Hatteras' march through the poem abruptly dealing out information.

The onslaughts within 'Cape Hatteras' are emphasized by the irregularity of the rhyme scheme as the poem continues to assail the reader with examples of conquest. Crane moves from man's attempted vanquishing of the skies to his 'mastery' of the sea. Ships for exploration have been abandoned for vessels of war; Columbus's ship has disappeared within the 'moving turrets' and the 'grey decks' of the 'dragon's covey.' The words that describe the 'dragon's covey' imply that the modern world is diminished rather than expanded; the ships 'hedge' and 'wrap' while the oblivious sailors 'ride / The blue's cloud-templed districts unto ether...' The 'Cetus-like' dirigible is the modern equivalent of the sea monster killed by Perseus, but there are no heroes here; the legends alluded to in 'fledged as the Pleiades' fall before this new power that 'Lay[s] siege and hurdle[s] Cirrus down the skies!'

[7] Brunner 229.

Submarines are creeping menaces: 'Low, shadowed of the Cape, / Regard the moving turrets!' Again, machinery wounds nature; its 'searchlights, like fencers, / Slit the sky's pancreas of foaming anthracite.' Instead of Venus rising from the foaming sea, Crane ironically addresses modern man rising from a maddened froth: 'O Corsair of the typhoon,—pilot, hear! / Thine eyes bicarbonated white by speed.' 'O Skygak, see / How from thy path above the levin's lance,' reminds us how far man has moved from the spirituality of 'The Dance.' Despite his 'new verities' and 'new latitudes,' man cannot 'condense eternity.' Under the weight of these accumulated images of over-reaching, man plummets downwards. Like Satan, his challenge for power ends in his ejection from the heavens.

The fall from glory is paralleled by the plunging plane and the layout of the poem; both spiral downwards. The language emphasizes the cyclical nature of war through mediaeval terms; 'escutcheoned wings / Lift agonized quittance, tilting from the invisible brink.' The height so dearly won in 'The Dance' falls away. The bright and delusional promise of 'The bearings glint,—O murmurless and shined / In oilrinsed circles of blind ecstasy!' finally disintegrates into

Giddily spiralled

gauntlets, upturned, unlooping

In guerrilla sleights, trapped in combustion gyr—

Ing, dance the curdled depth

down whizzing

Zodiacs, dashed

(now nearing fast the Cape!)

down gravitation's

vortex into crashed

....dispersion....into mashed and shapeless debris...

(CH, 145-154)

'Gauntlets' recalls 'throwing down the gauntlet' as an aggressive call to war. The alliterative 'g' sound falls apart in 'gyr— / Ing.' Man's attempt to physically grasp the stars has failed; Lewis rightly traces the failure to man's inability to see beyond the physical: 'He could, by further exploration of the skies, have sought like Columbus to perceive the divine shape in the physical universe, to read the ideal in the actual.'[8]

After the crash, the poem pauses, signified by the ellipsis and the gap in text. These types of division are used to mark a major turn in the poems; in 'Cutty Sark,' the division is between the real world and the world of the imagination. Here, Crane's despair has peaked. The poem cannot sustain the bleak tone and as it breaks, Crane is expelled. Freed but traumatized by his own world, he flees back into the alternative world of his imagination. Only the chance to reach out imaginatively remains and Crane does so; the pause, followed by the altered style, makes it appear that Crane, after taking stock, has wrenched the poem from the depths and started to pull it upwards. Crane calls upon Whitman for the third time, like Christ questioning Simon Peter. Crane's demands on Whitman prove his need for re-assurance to strengthen his resolve:

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[8] Lewis 333.

The stars have grooved our eyes with old persuasions
Of love and hatred, birth,—surcease of nations... (CH, 156-157)

Dryden's translation of the twelfth book of Virgil's Aeneid echoes here: 'The Nations over-aw'd, surcease the Fight.'[9] 'Surcease of nations' implies that Crane has almost overawed himself with the magnitude of the task that faces him but as Whitman's successor, he must not 'surcease the fight.'

But who has held the heights more sure than thou,
O Walt!—Ascensions of thee hover in me now. (CH, 158-159)

Crane's heights are always momentary, he ascends, pauses and then descends in order to climb again. 'Surcease' also suggests Macbeth's words as he ponders murder, 'If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well / It were done quickly. If th' assassination / could trammel up the consequence, and catch / With his surcease success.'[10] In a 1981 interview, the English actor, Ian McKellen, commented on how 'With his surcease success' is a 'brilliant use of two words which are almost the same sound, but have absolutely opposite meanings.'[11] Crane uses effects like this; the opposites of the old persuasions 'Of love and hatred, birth' are pondered here by Crane. The poet in his own world cannot reach the heights alone; only by expanding

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[9] Virgil, The Aeneid, trans. John Dryden, ed. Frederick M. Keener (London: Penguin, 1997) Book XII, line1024.

[10] Macbeth 1.7.1-4.

[11] Quoted in Giles 223.

his vision to admit Whitman's, can he push himself beyond the despair of 'Cape Hatteras.' Like Macbeth, Crane seeks reassurance that his course of action will be successful:

> O, upward from the dead
> Thou bringest tally, and a pact, new bound
> Of living brotherhood!' (CH, 165-167)

Listing the beauties of the earth, in the style of Whitman's 'Song of Myself,' symbolises Crane's acceptance of Whitman's instructions in line 4 of 'Poets to Come': 'Arouse! for you must justify me' and the later eighth and ninth lines: 'Leaving it to you to prove and define it, / Expecting the main things from you.'

As he recites the lines of praise, Crane once more gains mastery of his self as the poem rises from the crashed remains of the plane into a spring that is a vision of renewal: 'With June the mountain laurel broke through green / And filled the forest with what clustrous sheen!' The maddened 'eyes bicarbonated white by speed' are fitted into a more natural setting: 'Cowslip and shad-blow, flaked like tethered foam / Around bared teeth of stallions.' Calmed and convinced again of the possibilities of his own vision, Crane's poet protagonist takes control and begins the process of affirming. As 'The Dance' is invoked, the poet returns to its triumphant scenes on the hill 'Blue-writ and odor-firm with violets,' until he hears once more the thunder that denotes Maquokeeta:

> As vibrantly I followed down Sequoia alleys

Heard thunder's eloquence through green arcades.

(CH, 194-195)

Crane is re-playing and renewing the journey but the recommitment to the poetic vision is symbolized by Crane's dependence on Whitman. Even the celebratory song of praise, '*Panis Angelicus*! Eyes tranquil with the blaze / Of love's own diametric gaze, of love's amaze!' is a reinterpretation of Whitman's ninety-fifth line in 'Song of Myself' when he declares: 'And that a kelson of the creation is love.' While Crane works hard to convince us that he is both elated and grateful, he thanks Whitman for his deliverance from despair and for setting him back on his quest:

> Our Meistersinger, thou set breath in steel;
> And it was thou who on the boldest heel
> Stood up and flung the span on even wing
> Of that great Bridge, our Myth, whereof I sing! (CH, 204-207)

The poet finds Whitman, 'familiar' yet 'evasive,' too so that Whitman appears to personify the object of Crane's quest. Crane's reliance on Whitman is pragmatic but it enables the poet to continue 'To course that span of consciousness thou'st named / The Open Road' where 'vision is reclaimed!' The imagery that follows continues the theme of restoration; the quest is relaunched as a plane with 'Vast engines outward veering with seraphic grace' as evidence of restored vision. Crane continues to try to convince himself that he has chosen the best course of action by bringing in a rainbow,

one of his major symbols of hope, to overwhelm the darkness of the poem: 'the rainbow's arch—how shimmeringly stands / Above the Cape's ghoul-mound.' Throughout The Bridge, Crane has tried out the personae of fellow travellers but 'Cape Hatteras' exchanges the borrowing of experience for companionship:

> My hand
>
> In yours,
>
> Walt Whitman—
>
> so— (CH, 232-235)

The drawn-out, unfinished sentence is the textual evidence of being 'Afoot again, and onward without halt.' Despite the affirming 'hand-in-hand' image of Crane and Whitman, the poet uses broken syntax to imply doubt about the validity of his symbol. It is as if the poet's belief in himself and his symbol has been damaged by entering the world yet the symbol needs to exist in the world to be effective. There is no muse but Whitman; after the forced affirmation in 'Cape Hatteras', Crane 'slid[es] on that backward vision' into 'Three Songs' to find and reintegrate his own 'span of consciousness.'

'Three Songs'

The first two poems in this trilogy analyse the erotic images of Eve and Magdalene; the poems are fascinated by lust. Eve is the 'wraith of my unloved seed!' while Magdalene's audience, in 'National Winter garden,' 'flee

her spasm through a fleshless door....' The third poem contrasts them with the safe, innocent, but one-dimensional image of 'Mary' in 'Virginia.'

The rhyming schemes do not unite the poems. Instead, the tripartite scheme approximates to the three female archetypes of Eve, Magdalene and Mary. As the bridges of the poems are symbols of unity, connected by the interceding Virgin Mary and the renewing powers of Pocahontas, Crane's examination of these three figures appears to be an attempt to bridge the difference between himself as the male poet and his feminine constructions, but the attempt ends up putting more distance between the parties.

In the first poem, 'Southern Cross,' the poet dramatizes himself onboard a ship at night and, as he gazes at the night sky, imagines love with the imaginary woman that the sight of the Southern Cross, rising above the layers of reddened sky, symbolizes. The sunset is an erotic image for Crane; in 'For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen,' it is a symbol of sexual consummation:

> Reflective conversion of all things
> At your deep blush, when ecstasies thread
> The limbs and belly, when rainbows spread
> Impinging on the throat and sides... (F&H 1, 34-37)

Yet this sunset leaves 'vaporous scars' recalling the destructive planes of 'Cape Hatteras'; almost immediately the star begins to disintegrate as a symbol of inspiration. Initially Crane appears to be proposing that the star woman, far above him, represents the purity of spiritual love; she is 'High,

cool, / Wide from the slowly smoldering fire / Of lower heavens.' The complimentary Cranian terms of 'High, cool, / Wide' seem to praise, but the past tense of the preceding 'I wanted you' implies that symbol has deceived the poet and is therefore renounced by him. Female characters are supposed to inspire the poet, but Crane, finding support only from Whitman in 'Cape Hatteras,' berates all muses: 'Eve! Magdalene! / Or Mary, you?' Echoes of earlier works surface; the mocking apostrophe in 'O simian Venus' ironically suggests 'Recitative's' command to 'watch / While darkness, like an ape's face, falls away, / And gradually, white buildings answer day.' Crane, the tone of the poem implies, does not expect to discover a redemptive vision here.

The sea that Crane sails upon is a travesty of the sea in the second 'Voyages' poem; 'minstrel galleons of Carib fire' become 'this long wake of phosphor, / iridescent.' The 'And' that begins this line connotes the style of 'And yet this great wink of eternity,' but here there is no metaphysical conceit to begin a hymn of praise to time. There is no promise to compare to 'The seal's wide spindrift gaze toward paradise.' Instead 'the vortex of our grave,' is negatively reduced to 'Finally to answer all within one grave!' The 'undinal vast belly [that] moonward bends / Laughing' is lost within 'The embers of the cross / Climbed by aslant.' 'Embers' suggests that there is only burned out passion here.

The lines are laid out to mimic thought and hurry or pause as if through emotion. The epigraph from Marlowe's Hero and Leander strikes a warning note of failure, especially as the Southern Cross is the star that ships navigate by in the Southern Hemisphere. Marlowe's work is based upon the story of Leander who swam to Hero each night, guided by the light that shone from

the tower where Hero cared for the swans and sparrows dedicated to Venus. Crane's 'simian Venus,' the poem submits, lures rather than guides the poet with her light.

The past tense of the first line, 'I wanted you,' makes the poet's desire appear to be a recounted rather than a present experience but it is also a general statement that evaluates the universal image of Eve as whore. Initially, the star is addressed by the generic title of 'Woman of the South,' which suggests the Northern and Southern divides of the Civil War. Crane, the poet based in New York, represents the triumphant Union while the 'Woman of the South' represents the defeated Confederates. Their contrasting identities emphasize the chasm that has opened up between man and woman in The Bridge.

'Yes, Eve—wraith of my unloved seed!' is a parody of the 'Harbor Dawn's' 'recalls you to your love, there in a waking dream to merge your seed.' The memory of Crane's impotence in 'Cape Hatteras' still provokes him and, in revenge, he, too, makes a whore out of Eve: 'Rehearsed hair-docile, alas, from many arms.' The language is implicitly sexual; the Southern Cross 'takes night' while she 'lifts her girdles from her, one by one—.' These images suggest a provocative unveiling that anticipates the striptease of 'National Winter Garden.' There is also an implied sexual tension in the opposition between the 'High, cool, / wide' and the 'slowly smoldering fire / Of lower heavens' that Crane, humiliated by the absence of his muse in 'Cape Hatteras,' assigns to Eve. As Eve, she is man's undoing; she represents the metaphorical bridge that Crane could not cross in 'Cape Hatteras.' The language is that of Dante and Milton; the 'slowly smoldering fire / Of lower

heavens' is reinforced by 'embers of the Cross' and the 'whispering hell' of the present, while the combat between God and Satan is reworked in the references to 'God—your namelessness' and the 'black / Insolence' of Lucifer. Eve, representing all women in their pride, 'falls vainly on the wave,' but she is also a 'Rebel,' allied to Lucifer. In 'Cape Hatteras,' 'Adam and Adam's answer in the forest' starts the downward circle that culminates in Crane's contemporary world. Here, Crane compares her to the first Eve, who tempted Adam, 'O simian Venus, homeless Eve, / Unwedded, stumbling gardenless to grieve.' Crane's anger spawns an image of a confident, dangerous Venus creeping from the depths: 'All night the water combed you with black / Insolence. You crept out simmering, accomplished. / Water rattled that stinging coil.' Resentful that she is not a muse, Crane names her a Medusa. Although the Miltonic imagery of Paradise Lost permeates this piece, Crane allows his Satanic Eve no heroic qualities. She cannot redeem him; he will not grant her any redemptive qualities.

Crane acknowledges that his responses are themselves destructive in 'The mind is churned to spittle, whispering hell.' Through typographical devices of spacing, he imitates the limits of madness that Eve, representing all women, arouses in himself, as representative of man. While acknowledging the sexual thrall of the flesh which dominates his imagination and refuses to be put from his thoughts, Crane makes obvious that he recognizes that Eve's character is imposed upon her in the same way that night casts shadows :

> All night the water combed you with black
> Insolence. (SC, 27-28)

The rhymeless penultimate stanza symbolizes Eve's destructive quality; she destroys Crane's ability to rhyme but his faith in his imagination ensures that poetic authority is again imposed through the restoration of rhyme in the last couplet:

> The Cross, a phantom, buckled—dropped below the dawn.
> Light drowned the lithic trillions of your spawn. (SC, 33-34)

The Cross, completely dissociated from the redemptive identity of the Christian Cross, reverts to being a star invisible in daylight. The potential of 'lithic trillions' is washed away by the light of day..

In a similar change of mood to that between the first and second parts of 'For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen,' the lofty, failed vision of 'Southern Cross' descends into the brash, hypnotic world of 'National Winter Garden.' As Giles points out, quoting William H. Pritchard, 'one of the essential points about burlesque was its own consciousness of inhabiting this world of sentimentality and illusion.'[12]

This poem is written in quatrains with alternate rhymes. The theme is still that of destructive desire, but the setting has moved to a burlesque house in lower Manhattan where 'Outspoken buttocks in pink beads / Invite the necessary cloudy clinch / of bandy eyes.' The language of the poem deliberately parodies other poems in the same way that the striptease parodies Crane's sacred rituals of love.

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[12] Giles 65.

The ritual of 'The Dance' becomes a degraded 'tom-tom scrimmage,' the drum beat emphasizing the build up to the climax of the stripper's performance is a distortion of

> Dance, Maquokeeta! snake that lives before,
> That casts his pelt, and lives beyond! Sprout, horn!
> Spark, tooth! Medicine-man, relent, restore-
> Lie to us,—dance us back the tribal morn! (Dan, 57-60)

In contrast, the setting of 'National Winter Garden' is a Hades, suggested through 'Then rush the nearest exit through the smoke,' but there is no Persephone for the poet to rescue in order to redeem himself. Where other poems acted as mini-summaries of The Bridge, here the stripper's performance becomes a sardonic synopsis of the quest. The dance is stage-managed, like the poems, to provide a few minutes of suspended reality. The dance builds to a climax, emphasized by 'mount, surmount,' in 'Her silly snake rings begin to mount, surmount,' then quickly disintegrates:

> We wait that writhing pool, her pearls collapsed,
> —All but her belly buried in the floor. (NWG, 21-22)

Like Crane, the audience pursue an ideal but never experience the poet's visionary rewards. Instead, they are left wanting, 'Always you wait for someone else though, always.'

Flesh overwhelms the images from the first poem. The sea that Eve emerged from in 'Southern Cross' is reduced to 'The world's one flagrant, sweating cinch' and 'a drench of whirling strands.' Crane apes the trappings of love, the 'somewhere violin,' and caps his mockery by recording the hurried disappearance of the audience after the performance, as they 'rush the nearest exit through the smoke.' Like the female star of the 'Southern Cross' the dancer is essentially anonymous, only visible as a sum of sexual parts below her neck; the dancer here has eyes that only exist in 'swivellings of her teats.' Eve, combed with 'black insolence,' and dressed in 'this long wake of phosphor, / iridescent' now glitters as a kaleidoscope of moving colour: 'Sprayed first with ruby, then with emerald sheen—.' As the daughter of Eve, she wears Eve's symbolic serpent upon her hands, reduced to 'Her silly snake rings' but the image is one of disintegration. Just as Larry from 'Indiana' deteriorates into the drunken sailor of 'Cutty Sark,' the dancer is a disintegrating representation of 'The Dance', with 'turquoise fakes on tinselled hands.' The movement of the dancer's arms makes the snakes appear to mate; yet paradoxically, the climax of the dance is reported in descending language.

Crane chooses the motion of the trapeze to illustrate the inevitability of the pull of sexual desire and the way in which the audience experiences the Renaissance idea of death/orgasm: 'each comes back to die alone.' This return also re-admits the dancer back into Crane's poetic fold. Apostrophizing the dancer as the repentant biblical prostitute who waited by the sepulchre ('O Magdalene, each comes back to die alone'), Crane no longer condemns her. Instead, he finds a way to reintegrate her into the processes of The Bridge, in

a not wholly satiric reference to Christ's redemptive rising from the grave: 'Then you, the burlesque of our lust—and faith, / Lug us back lifeward—bone by infant bone.' As Giles points out:

> It is not faith which lugs us back, it is Magdalene. Magdalene is the burlesque of human lust and of human faith. Although it is possible to read *faith* as the redemptive agent, which would secularize the process of renewal, and make it more dependent on an effort of human will, this romantic freedom is balanced by reliance on a more impersonal power, in the same way as Columbus' epic discovery of America was balanced and made possible by the financial backings of the Spanish court.[13]

The idea of life as a journey towards death is reversed. Like the poet's quest, progress is often dependent on returning to the beginning. The stripper has 'burlesqued' the quest; here flesh is the substitute for faith, but it affirms the body and not the imagination. For Crane, only love can perform the transformation;

> Star kissing star through wave on wave unto
> Your body rocking!
> and where death, if shed,
> Presumes no carnage, but this single change,—
> Upon the steep floor flung from dawn to dawn

[13] Giles 68.

The silken skilled transmemberment of song. (V-3, 13-18)

The dancer can only imitate the rituals.

The last song consists of four six-line verses, an accompanying chorus and an irregular rhyming scheme. Crane explained this song as 'virgin in process of "being built."'[14] Sugg suggests that in 'Three Songs', 'the imagination explores the possibilities of appealing to and possessing love in the modern world. Each song addresses a type of Woman: Eve, Magdalene, or Mary, who are associated with memory, desire and imagination, as well as with a song, a dance and a building.'[15] Giles believes that 'Crane's commercial puns serve to undermine the pastoral illusions in "Virginia.' The puns bridge a high world of social respectability with a low world of mercantile transaction.[16] Giles claims that the poem is the most misunderstood in The Bridge for 'the puns in "Virginia" tilt the poem back to reveal beneath this sentimentality a lurid and criminal underside.'[17] Yet is this not another side of the world of the 'Proem?'

Although the poems appear to explore the three concepts of woman, and all three are portrayed stereotypically, Crane uses these poems to assert their potential for his Bridge. Eve is a seductress who destroys man, 'Magdalene' as penitent whore is not really examined and 'Mary' is never more than one-dimensional. The first two poems seem to resent the power of

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[14] LHC 272.

[15] Sugg 84.

[16] Giles 49.

[17] Giles 47.

desire; any exploration is ironic. Mary appears to be a working girl whom Crane light-heartedly transforms into a symbol of inspiration. Her image stretches from the type of T. S. Eliot's typist in 'The Fire Sermon' to that of Mary, the Mother of God.

Again Crane uses the images of Christianity as a reference point. Mary is 'blue-eyed, as befits an 'all American' girl but the image also pivots on the westernised concept of the mother of God. The peal of church bells combines images from both the secular and religious worlds, 'high carillon / From the popcorn bells!' Venus has gone, lingering only in 'oyster shells!' This poem has no bodily emphasis to torment the poet by reminding him of the sexual power that destroys creativity instead of promoting it. Mary is a girl rather than a woman; Crane associates her with 'green figs,' with 'the noon of May,' and with Spring daffodils and shy violets. Within the 'mine' of the first chorus is the suggestion that Mary's youth is the speaker's to mould, to change from 'Saturday Mary' to 'Cathedral Mary.'

The singer wants to protect his protégé's innocence so he transplants her to the ivory tower of his imagination: 'O Mary, leaning from the high wheat tower, / Let down your golden hair!' The 'wheat' tower recalls the 'Hushed gleaming fields and pendant seething wheat / Of knowledge' of 'Ave Maria,' but 'Virginia's' Mary is so one-dimensional, she cannot act as a parallel to the poet; she is fleshless, existing within Crane's imagination as a puppet-muse. Mary is not holding Hero's lamp; she only offers promise when commanded: 'Let down your golden hair!' The fairy story of Rapunzel is used to illustrate the poet's appeal to the creative side of his imagination, but it also tells of the princess, imprisoned in her tower to protect her from the outside world. Crane

decorates his muse's tower with innocent rather than exotic flowers: 'On cornices of daffodils / The slender violets stray.' The word 'stray' sounds a warning note of escape, but it is the poet who needs to flee from the strictures of these songs; under the easy metre, questions relate to the poet as much as to the girl: 'Mary (what are you going to do?)' Crane needs to turn the poem round so that he can destroy his manufactured idyll, in order to build again. 'Forget-me-nots at window panes' also signal a return to the earlier part of The Bridge; through association they suggest the 'myriad snowy hands clustering at the panes' in 'The Harbor Dawn.' There the snow obscures the window; here the associated image clears the mind and Crane is forced to acknowledge, in the phrase 'Cathedral Mary' the fabricated nature of the tower he has built: 'Out of the way-up nickel-dime tower shine, / Cathedral Mary, / Shine!—' Despite her compliance, Mary does not arouse the poet enough to bridge the gap between creative and loveless desire. The poet must abandon the constructed world of the 'Songs' and return to his bridge, to await an external Maryan intercession. How else can he construct the imaginary bridge that will '*descend / And of the curveship lend a myth to God.*'

Chapter 6

'Quaker Hill,' 'The Tunnel,' and 'Atlantis.'

'—One Song, one Bridge of Fire! Is it Cathay' (At, 93)

Throughout The Bridge, Crane's progress is based upon wresting some form of affirmation from each individual section. Often, Crane works to find this hope by contrasting the past, as a place of possibility, with the sterility of the present. The poem pivots upon such contrasts; the recognition of spirituality allows the poet to make an affirmation, but once he has returned to his own time, the next section resists the certainty abstracted from the last, and Crane must start the process again. As a result, the prevailing emotional condition of the poem is often a battle against negativity rather than one for affirmation. Of crucial importance are the poet-protagonist's moods and responses which are reflected in the movements within the sections. Even though Crane's affirmations are momentary, the reader infers that without the efforts of the poet, the world would be a place of imaginative desolation, devoid of hope. In 'Voyages,' the poem ends with an avowal of the 'imaged Word', proposing poetry as a consolation for the loss of optimism. 'Quaker Hill' ends on an almost religious consolatory note, but its solace cannot stem the suggestion that the poet's entrance into 'The Tunnel' is a plunge into the depths of the modern world.

1 'Quaker Hill'

'Quaker Hill' was the last section of The Bridge to be conceived and completed. The poem stands alone in its own section, suggesting that Crane means the section to help connect 'Three Songs' and 'The Tunnel.' Its setting is an old Quaker settlement where the 'Friends' lived and worshipped, a settlement which has become a weekend retreat for the new rich. Lewis describes it as displaying a 'blind loveless vulgarity which, in the 1920's seemed to Crane to be the dreary outcome of the American dream of a promised Land.'[1] Yet while the poet pays lip-service to his loathing of 'Quaker Hill's' spiritual degeneration, there is no passion in his disgust after the mockery in the first stanza. Disillusioned and apathetic, the poet's own pose is world-weary: 'But I have seen death's stare in slow survey / From four horizons that no one relates...,' implying that while he has survived the journey to this point, he has lost sight of the bright hopes of his quest. The tone of the epigraphs supports this stance. The first quotation, attributed to Isadora Duncan, states that 'no ideals have ever been fully successful on this earth.' Lewis believes that Crane used these words because he was impressed by Duncan's dancing: an admiration expressed in strong terms, in a letter to Gorham Munson.[2] The quotation anticipates failure; it implies that the poet's ideals will also fail. As such, the epigraph is a disturbing portent for 'Quaker Hill.' Combs points out that 'it is significant that at this point in The Bridge that Crane does not focus upon Duncan's redemptive message but

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[1] Lewis 350.

[2] LHC 109.

upon her disillusionment.'[3] Emily Dickinson's lines, describing autumn, are from a poem about the end of life and summer; they surface in the 'mapled vistas' of Crane's third stanza, and hint at the end of Crane's quest.[4] Although Dickinson's lines intimate the movement towards closure in 'Atlantis,' 'The Tunnel' has yet to be negotiated and there is no clue to any triumph that might lie in wait. Crane's task is to take the poem forward, despite his fatigue. The poet, exhausted from his trial in 'Cape Hatteras,' and unrenewed by his 'Three Songs', must still seek his vision, so briefly grasped in 'Cutty Sark.' The vision, as always, proves elusive; instead, the poet seeks solace in his redemptive role.

The poem has a regular structure. It is written in the present tense and the stanzas are all eight lines with an alternate rhyme scheme. From the first line, the poem is accusatory. The bovine-like tourists are presented as the result of the fall of the ideal; they represent the spiritual bankruptcy of Quaker Hill, implied through the past tense of 'This was the Promised Land.' 'Quaker Hill's' characters seem typical Cranian types of the modern world, selfish and thoughtless, evidenced by 'Perspective never withers from their eyes.' Where they differ from the characters of the other poems is that they arouse no compassion in Crane; instead, he resists them, because they 'are awkward, ponderous and uncoy.' Crane no longer assumes the identity of his characters; his use of 'we,' 'us' and 'our' places him more in opposition to the

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[3] Combs 156.

[4] Emily Dickinson, 'Poem no. 18,' The Complete Poems, ed. Thomas H. Johnson (London: Faber, 1970).

tourists who are the main focus of the poem rather than to the anonymous group in the bar:

> While we who press the cider mill, regarding them—
> We, who with pledges taste the bright annoy
> Of friendship's acid wine, retarding phlegm,
> Shifting reprisals (QH, 10-13)

'We' is rhetorical; Crane is as disillusioned by the residents as by the visitors. The poet shares no affinity with them because they too do not recognize when 'The jest is too sharp to be kindly?' Despite the brief visionary moment in 'Cutty Sark,' Crane has absorbed the disillusionment of the drunken sailor. It surfaces in 'Quaker Hill.'

Concerned with 'seeing' and 'not seeing,' the first four stanzas examine perception through direct references to eyes and sight. The first verse describes those who refuse to see beyond their own lives: 'they do not trouble / Even to cast upon the seasons fleeting.' The second stanza refers to the remnants of the 'Quaker Hill' community, those whose eyes gaze outwards at the tourists, described in the line, 'While we who press the cider mill, regarding them...' Crane captures their shallowness and lack of direction in 'boast / Much of our store of faith in other men,' and implies that they too are like the tourists; those 'cows that see no other thing / Than grass and snow, and their own inner being.' The third stanza concentrates on the symbolic eyes of 'old Mizzentop' which look backwards. Its windows watch but they reflect, too; the 'cinquefoil dormer/ Portholes' are eyes that mirror the sight of

earlier eyes: 'Long tiers of windows staring out toward former / Faces.' The view in the fourth stanza is Crane's, 'High from the central cupola.' The poet appears at one with 'old Mizzentop';he looks backwards towards 'The Dance' to wipe out the memory of 'abysmal cupolas of space.'[5] The poet, like the building, waits and watches: 'See them, like eyes that still uphold some dream / Through mapled vistas, cancelled reservations.' 'Cancelled reservations' refers to more than cancelled bookings; it suggests the broken promises that have haunted the poem since 'The Dance.' Like the building, the poet looks down upon 'Quaker Hill' and from this viewpoint, he is separate spatially and imaginatively from the homogeneous group of weekenders who 'keep that docile edict of the Spring / That blends March with August Antarctic skies.'

The poem is shaped by an irregular pattern of ellipsis which marks out the poem's five major statements. The first ellipsis isolates the tourists in the line, 'And they are awkward, ponderous and uncoy...', as if nothing else needs to be said. The second highlights the contradiction of the hotel's attitude; 'patience' implies waiting but the windows look backwards:

> Long tiers of windows staring out toward former
> Faces—loose panes crown the hill and gleam
> At sunset with a silent, cobwebbed patience... (QH, 20-22)

The ambiguity symbolizes the poet's dilemma; while he longs to return to the sanctuary of 'The Dance,' he must wait for the next transformative moment.

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[5] Line 216 in 'Cape Hatteras.'

Crane cannot unlock the windows' secrets, although his language confirms his belief that answers lie within their history. Associating sight with poetic vision, denied to the sighted but blind visitors, the poet confers the affirmative implications of 'crown' and 'gleam' upon 'old Mizzentop' because its windows are 'like eyes that still uphold some dream.' It is this dream which has led Crane onwards in his quest yet in this poem the dream is undermined by the first epigraph. The third ellipsis draws attention to the poet's lofty and isolated position; not only is he between tourists and residents, but he looks down from the geographical centre of the poem: 'High from the central cupola, they say / One's glance could cross the borders of three states.' Three states refers to the view in front of, and to each side of the poet but it also alludes to the three states of birth, life and death. From this viewpoint, the poet enters the poem from the vantage of the imagination, outside of and above the physical scene. The imagination enables Crane to extend beyond the boundaries of the three states, 'From four horizons that no one relates...' This ellipsis, like those in the preceding verses, implies that everything has been said, but, in addition, it promotes the effect of 'the hawk's far stemming view' and the all-seeing rotating head which sees 'death's stare in slow survey.'

The idea of a hawk's eye view on an immoral society is one that other poets have used to emphasize their examination. W. H. Auden's poem 'Consider this and in our time,'[6] written in 1930, contains many similarities to 'Quaker Hill.' The 'plate-glass windows of the Sport Hotel' match those of 'old

[6] W. H. Auden, The English Auden: Poems, Essays and Dramatic Writings 1927 – 1939 (Faber, London. 1977).

Mizzentop, palatial white / Hostelry.' Auden's rich are 'Dangerous, easy in furs, in uniform' while Crane's are dressed in 'plaid plusfours.' The radio tells its audience how to feel and think in both poems. Each poem is set within the corrupt modern world, but while Crane aligns himself with the hawk: 'So, must we from the hawk's far stemming view,' Auden shares the time and view but not the body: 'Consider this and in our time / As the hawk sees it or the helmeted airman.' Distance lends enchantment to neither poet; Crane prefers to impose the ghosts from the past upon his landscape: 'The resigned factions of the dead preside. / Dead rangers bled their comfort on the snow.' Defeated by the spiritual emptiness of the present, the poet will have to construct some comfort from his memories of 'The Dance,' 'But I must ask slain Iroquois to guide / Me further than scalped Yankees knew to go.'

Despite distance miniaturizing the 'Czars / Of Golf' on their golf courses, they stride through the poem 'in plaid plusfours,' as the new heirs of 'Quaker Hill,' 'Weekenders avid of their turf-won scores.' A bereft Crane, desperate to populate his contemporary panorama with people worthy of its past, is left to mourn the disappearance of that earlier period: 'Where are my kinsmen and the patriarch race?' Berthoff describes it thus, 'Within this enclave of golf courses, antique-hunting, and real estate deals only the poet still sees, behind everything, "death's stare in slow survey."'[7] Berthoff's statement captures the enhanced, visionary capabilities of the poet, by default, the poet's isolation is also highlighted. Crane is not one of the 'highsteppers that no mouse / Who saw the Friends there ever heard before.'

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[7] Berthoff 106.

Alone and uninspired, he records this place of history that trails off into the fourth ellipsis:

> The woodlouse mortgages the ancient deal
> Table that Powitzky buys for only nine-
> Ty-five at Adams' auction,—eats the seal,
> The spinster polish of antiquity... (QH, 42-45)

Sugg notes the pun on Adam's action in 'Adams' auction.' Giles succinctly paraphrases Suggs's point: 'Here the auction in the material world mirrors the primal event, the fall of Man, so that the pun becomes synecdochic of all human history.'[8] The line break emphasizes the pun on 'deal.' 'Nine- / Ty-Five' is split to maintain the rhyme but it also intimates the exhausted forces at work in the poem where only the 'resigned factions of the dead preside' for the poet. The earlier pun on 'cancelled reservations' intimated a hankering after a return to the certainties of 'The Dance'; here the answers that Crane sought within the 'loose panes [that] crown the hill and gleam / At sunset' prove elusive - all that remains are further questions: 'Who holds the lease on time and on disgrace? / What eats the pattern with ubiquity? / Where are my kinsmen and the patriarch race?'

The interrogative tone, suggested by three questions one after another, implies that Crane is desperate to escape but the final ellipsis of 'the arrant page / That unfolds a new destiny to fill...' is an incontrovertible statement that

[8] Giles 16.

reminds the poet of his obligations. The poet's entreaty to his 'kinsmen and the patriarch race' calls up the 'resigned factions of the dead' to show him a way out marked by the blood of 'slain Iroquois,' 'Dead rangers' and 'scalped Yankees.' By acknowledging them all, in the almost autobiographical terms of 'Shoulder the curse of sundered parentage,' Crane reiterates a line of ancestry from 'The Dance.' Bowing out of this part of the quest, the poet uses the same words to leave as those that he used to enter. The words 'But I,' in their repetition, create the effect that the poet's intrusion into the scene has left no trace; it exists exactly as before. Yet although the scene is unchanged, the poet is; Crane accepts that he needs to shoulder the burdens of the poet and, in effect, kneels down to make a prayer of atonement: 'Must we descend as worm's eye to construe / Our love of all we touch, and take it to the Gate.' 'Must' repeated twice, affirms the poet's destiny while 'Gate' signposts Crane's escape from 'Quaker Hill and points him towards the epigraph of 'The Tunnel.'[9] Crane resigns from the poem 'As humbly as a guest who knows himself too late', but the lingering image is of a poet recognizing the inevitability of his destiny. Reminded, the poet admits to its truth by beginning the next line with the acquiescing 'So.' The poet accepts the price that poetry demands in 'yes, take this sheaf of dust upon your tongue!':

> Arise—yes, take this sheaf of dust upon your tongue!
> In one last angelus lift throbbing throat—

[9] Fender 80. Fender explains the epigraph thus, 'in Blake's symbolism, the west represents pity, and the east, wrath.'

Listen, transmuting silence with that stilly note. (QH, 62-64)

Even as the Eucharistic language signals Crane's belief in the redemptive power of poetry, 'this sheaf of dust' suggests the poet's fears by implying that the symbolic wafer has disintegrated and that the quest will collapse for the image extends beyond the Eucharist to the 'sheaf' of paper that the poem is written upon. By accepting the bitterness of the prophet's role, Crane reconfirms the stance of the poet of 'Cape Hatteras' and places himself back within a tradition 'Of pain that Emily, that Isadora knew!' The poet's role is to 'transmute silence' and 'transmember song'; to bring to all 'that triple-noted clause of moonlight', even if it 'breaks the heart.' The pun on the whippoorwill, the American nightjar, progresses from the musical 'triple-noted clause of moonlight' but 'whip-poor-will' is laden with suggestions of religious suffering. The hyphenated word prepares for the Hopkins-like lines that bind the poet's acceptance of himself:

Yes, whip-poor-will, unhusks the heart of fright,
Breaks us and saves, yes, breaks the heart, yet shields
That patience that is armour and that shields
Love from despair—when love foresees the end—
Leaf after autumnal leaf
break off,
descend—
descend— (QH, 68-75)

The suggestive shapes of 'dim elm-chancels' makes a suitably hallowed background for the poet to 'unhusk' the 'Hushed gleaming fields and pendant seething wheat' through suffering. Crane has retrospectively broken through the armour of the dreaming windows by understanding their 'silent, cobwebbed patience' and deciphering the symbolism of 'loose panes' that 'crown the hill and gleam.' Religious associations cluster: 'crown' connotes the crown of thorns while 'gleam' connotes the Resurrection. The acceptance of the crown of thorns 'breaks' and saves' and 'shields / Love from despair', but it is a temporary redemption. Once again the poet has used his role to promote a recognition of beauty but at cost to himself. Within this affirmation, Nature is re-assigned her rightful place in Crane's cyclical process of redemption: 'Leaf after autumnal leaf / Break off'; March and August no longer merge into the bland season that 'blends March with August Antarctic skies.' Emboldened, Crane prepares for his descent into 'The Tunnel' and bravely signifies his intent with text that imitates descending steps but almost immediately we are made aware that he is faltering by the dashes after 'descend.'

2 'The Tunnel'

If The Bridge is a poetic search for belief, then 'The Tunnel' is Crane's account of the poet's sacrificial descent into Hell, as part of that task. In 'The Dance,' Crane suggested that renewal is brought about by sacrifice. 'Quaker Hill' confirmed the poet's willingness to sacrifice himself. As Giles states:

> The Bridge sometimes seems to be reunifying the fragments of a fallen world, at other times it appears more like a self-parodic exercise, a confession of the arbitrary and ultimately invalid nature of all belief.[10]

Here, the idea of sacrifice is sustained through allusions to the Resurrection and Persephone.

The mythological model grows out of Crane's perception of the modern world as a spiritual desert; what is at stake for him is shown in the poem's references and similarities to The Waste Land. Both The Waste Land and The Bridge represent spiritual waste lands, although Crane's poem is an account of a search for a solution while Eliot's poem remains an elegy. Gareth Reeves helpfully explains that 'The disintegration of European civilisation is the scenario for what comes across as a general sexual, moral and spiritual collapse.'[11] Persephone's presence in the poem is intimated through Crane's descent into the underground system; the withered earth results from her abduction by Hades. According to Greek myth, Demeter, Persephone's mother, the goddess of wheat and grain, neglected her crops while she wandered the earth in search of her stolen daughter. To make the earth fertile again, Zeus allowed Persephone to revisit the earth for six months each year. Spring is generated by her departure from Hades and Autumn

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[10] Giles 18.

[11] Gareth Reeves, T.S. Eliot's 'The Waste Land' (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994) 4. The author argues that 'The sense of resistance a reader experiences, even today, on encountering "The Waste Land" is essential to it.' ix.

begins when she returns. In effect, Persephone represents the seed, buried in the earth, returning in the form of new growth. The myth is reworked in 'The Dance' but in 'The Tunnel' there is no Pocahontas to mate with Crane; like Hades in his dark kingdom, before the abduction of Persephone, Crane is lonely. The allusions connect through the need for sacrifice before the earth can be renewed but Crane, through his extension of this symbolism to Poe as the 'failed' seed or symbol, betrays his own fears about completing his task.

The Bridge is meant to be a rebuttal of Eliot's pessimism, a poetry that aims 'towards a more positive, or (if [I] must put it so in a sceptical age) ecstatic goal.'[12] In some ways, however, Crane's poem proves Eliot's pessimism well-founded; the poem constantly asserts, despite the poet's efforts to disprove, that 'no ideals have ever been fully successful on this earth.' Yet paradoxically the poem is not hopeless, for the poem's strength is in this despair; although the poet betrays his fears that his ambition is a form of over-reaching, his anxieties do not prevent him from challenging that fear. At the end of 'Quaker Hill,' when Crane accepts the redemptive role of the poet, the arrangement of the last words on the page and the dashes trailing off betray anxiety through their unfinished nature. The typographical lay-out of the lines prepares for the next downward cycle in the way the word 'descend' is isolated. As Crane descends into 'The Tunnel,' 'girded up,' metaphorically, by his 'kinsmen and the patriarch race' we are left to wonder how far his poetic belief will take him before he is again overwhelmed by the forces within the poem. Line 18 answers that question; 'Or can't you quite make up your

[12] LHC 115.

mind to ride' underlines Crane's reluctance to begin yet another journey, yet he must because boarding the 'L' marks the beginning of this physical and metaphorical journey.

The train journey is a literal one, continuing the theme of imaginative quest. Fender describes it thus:

> The journey implied here is down Manhattan on the Inter-borough Rapid Transit local (i.e. stopping) subway from Columbus Circle (a residential area), Times Square (the old centre of the theatre district), Fourteenth Street (a busy shopping and commercial centre), to Chambers Street, on the lower West Side (a transfer point to the IRT express to Brooklyn). The express runs under the East River parallel to the Brooklyn Bridge and emerges as an elevated train ('el' or 'L') from which the bridge can be seen; Flatbush, a residential area in Brooklyn, is one of the stops on the express line.[13]

The journey is from North-West to South-East, drawn towards the East River. The poem uses the metaphor of a train journey to describe the spiritual journey towards the 'Gates of Wrath.' However, Blake's 'western path' represents a journey 'Right thro' the Gates of Wrath.' Crane, the questor, will approach his own 'Gates of Wrath'; he must begin his own perilous journey, of his own free will, by entering the darkness.

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[13] Fender 80.

The poem starts with the by now familiar method of describing the contemporary world. The first four lines describe the busy night-life of New York yet the line 'Performances, assortments, résumés' also describes the fabric of the poem. Alliteration in 'Columbus Circle,' 'Channel the congresses,' and 'thousand theatres,' and the consonance of the double 's' sound in 'congresses' and 'sessions' makes the setting seem familiar; the repetition implies that we have been here before. To prevent the weariness of 'Quaker Hill' seeping into this poem, Crane changes its regular rhyming pattern. There, the fixed rhyme scheme anticipated the conciliation that Crane reaches after complying with 'a new destiny to fill...' Because the conciliation is a compromise rather than an about-face, the alteration is understated, from ABAB, CDCD to AABB, CCDD. In 'The Tunnel' this effect is abandoned from the start by an abrupt, rhetorical style. Visually, the poem appears to be in irregular verse form, effectively mimicking the poet's thoughts. Dashes abound, separating one thought from another or trailing off into nothingness. While the rhyming scheme is not continuous, it is deliberate enough to suggest that the poet has consciously entered 'The Tunnel.' Paradoxically, the irregularities suggest a fear of losing control of either the journey or the poetry, or both. Each section is a Cranian performance that comments on earlier sections, emphasized by the poem's reference to 'Times Square.' 'Van Winkle' is lightly suggested through 'Times', while 'Columbus Circle' is a reminder of 'Ave Maria.' 'Refractions of the thousand theatres, faces—' connect to the audience of 'Proem,' 'I think of cinemas, panoramic sleights / With multitudes bent toward some flashing scene.' Just as 'lights / Channel the congresses,' these references channel reaction to the poem.

This extension of mood from one section to another unites the poem as a whole. Associations with Crane's other poems, via language and subject and the poet's 'logic of metaphor,' adumbrate even The Bridge as just one part of the journey that makes all of Crane's poetry seem part of an ongoing journey.

As the poem starts to move from the generalised into the specific, Crane abandons his sermonizing style and addresses himself as man's representative, 'Then let you reach your hat and go.' Gradually the metaphor of life as a three-act play metamorphoses into a journey that will take Crane to his 'ecstatic goal' or to his metaphoric death in his quest for 'home.' 'Home' is the promised haven of poetic imagination, the place he will attempt to reach again and again: 'As usual you will meet the scuttle yawn: / The subway yawns the quickest promise home.' The 'yawn' symbolises the tunnel; to emphasise the importance of the symbol's significance, the word is repeated. The repetition has the effect of underlining Crane's subconscious recognition of danger, the tunnel is the mouth of hell as well as the literal tunnel which will take the poet 'home.' This danger is first anticipated in line five, where Crane introduces the 'Mysterious kitchens'; an allusion to the menace of 'Hell's Kitchen'[14]. Apart from the criminality associated with the phrase, the allusion takes us directly into a Hell which the poet still resists, 'Finger your knees—and wish yourself in bed.' 'Finger your knees' implies that the poet's knees are still painful from his obeisance in 'Quaker Hill.'

[14] The New York neighbourhood bordered by 14th and 52nd Streets and Eighth Avenue and the waterfront.

Crane's descent into the underground system confirms that the poet will brave the 'Gates of Wrath,' but it is an authorial device to mark out that although he exchanges the 'Hell' of the present for the Hades of the imagination, the poem treats them as variations of the same state. To stress further their interrelation, Crane emphasizes that man creates his own state of 'reality' by his metaphor of life as a play. Building on the first metaphor of the kitchen, 'And watch the curtain lift in hell's despite,' Crane's imagination acknowledges the inherently fallen nature of Man: 'You'll find the garden in the third act dead.' 'The Clod and the Pebble' is the basis for Crane's line 'And watch the curtain lift in hell's despite', a line which modifies Blake's line 'And builds a Hell in Heaven's despite.' This is the third variation of Blake's lines in The Bridge,[15] and the respective values of the clod and pebble invite consideration. Like Milton in Paradise Lost, Crane is aware that it is the mind that creates and names its surroundings: 'The mind is its own place, and in itself / Can make a heav'n of hell, a hell of heav'n.'[16]

Despite this danger, the poet is drawn towards his journey, 'Out of the square, the Circle burning bright.' 'Burning bright' connotes inspiration; it also evokes the first line of Blake's 'The Tyger,'[17] and reinforces the sense of danger that is part of the quest. 'The Tyger' is written in deceptively simple rhyming pairs of lines that play down the complexity of the poem's subject, but it is a 'Song of Experience'; by alluding to it, Crane is making a similar claim for the danger in his own poem. The allusion to Blake's poem is heightened

[15] 'Down, down—born pioneers in time's despite.' (Riv 112) 'The pebbles sang,' in Ind 17.

[16] Milton, PW. 'Paradise Lost,' 1. 2. 254-5.

[17] Blake, CP.

by Crane's use of rhyme; although his lines are not as seemingly undemanding as Blake's, he too uses repeated rhymes that, in their simplicity, refute any sinister imputations: 'Avoid the glass doors gyring at your right, / Where boxed alone a second, eyes take fright / —Quite unprepared rush naked back to light.'

'Boxed alone', the poet feels his isolation as he is swept along by the 'hiving swarms.' The crowds are rushing home, emphasized by the play upon 'swarming hives,' but Crane's loneliness is increased rather than decreased by these masses. The poet's sense of his own role, granted to him at the end of 'Quaker Hill' through the suggestive 'Arise,' has vanished with the crowds; he is left 'Quite unprepared' to 'rush naked back to light.' The image is one of birth but 'back' blurs it; instead it conjures up Orpheus who entered Hades in search of his dead wife, Eurydice. Orpheus's song so charmed Hades and Persephone that Orpheus was allowed to lead his wife back to the surface, providing that he did not look back until they had reached the light. The life of quest is a journey towards the symbolic light of creativity, but first the poet must brave the dark, not look back, and hope too that his song pleases. Commitment is symbolised by putting in the coin: 'And down beside the turnstyle press the coin / Into the slot.' Crane's journey payment also reinforces that he is descending into hell; his coin takes into account Charon's fee of one obol, while 'the slot' suggests the mouth of the dead person in which the coin is placed. Having paid his due, the poet begins his journey across his own symbolic Styx, for the railway is a distorted river symbol:

And so

of cities you bespeak
subways, rivered under streets
and rivers... (Tun, 31-34)

All the former symbolism of 'The River' as a metaphor for life's journey is brought to bear on this new symbol of the subway as the Styx, 'rivered under streets / and rivers.' The train travels both overground and underground; like an emblem of the Bridge's changes of mood, it aims for the heights, but it is called back, again and again, to the depths as the ellipsis mimics the disappearance of Crane's train (or Charon's boat) into darkness. Crane's emphasis on the dual overground and underground nature of his journey demonstrates that contrasting meanings are obscured by the similarity of sounds: 'In the car / the overtone of motion / underground' blends into 'the monotone / of motion is the sound' while the cycle completes itself in 'other faces, also underground,' but the tautness of these lines indicates that the poet is still in control.

Crane, the seemingly invisible observer who has drunk from Hades' cup of darkness, reports the snippets of conversations that take place around him as 'Our tongues recant like beaten weather vanes.' The 'our' is a rhetorical device like the 'we' and 'our' of 'Quaker Hill.' The effect endorses Crane as the poet who translates for others, 'This answer lives like verdigris, like hair / Beyond extinction, surcease of the bone.' 'Surcease' carries echoes of its use in 'Cape Hatteras': 'Of love and hatred, birth—surcease of nations...' Both uses allude to a timelessness beyond the body, for hair grows after death. Questions are asked, alluding to the questions asked of Peter when he

denied Jesus Christ[18] and later enhanced by Crane's reference to the cock crowing: 'O cruelly to inoculate the brinking dawn.' This connotation is supported by the later Crucifixion imagery of 'did their riding eyes right through your side.' This series of questions, experienced as eavesdropped oddments, belongs to the world of the train yet operates on a more general level; the questions recall those asked in 'Quaker Hill' as well as man's quest for knowledge of himself: 'What / What do you want? Snippets drift around Crane, sometimes interrogatively and sometimes accusatory in tone: 'if / you don't like my gate why did you / swing on it, why *didja* / swing on it / anyhow—.' The lines show an echoing in Crane's thoughts of something overheard and then extended into imagined comment: 'And somehow anyhow swing—.'

Crane's thoughts are made to appear as if they are going round and round by the way in which he intermixes the imagery of New York and the brain 'In interborough fissures of the mind.' The transposing of images extends to Hell as well: 'The phonographs of hades in the brain / Are tunnels that re-wind themselves.' The lines imply a distorted 'Circle burning bright,' which the poet cannot leave. Despite his desire to transform man's experience of life through the grandeur of the imagination, Crane is forced to acknowledge the finiteness of life and its banality, encapsulated in the line, 'and love / A burnt match skating in a urinal.' The image extinguishes 'the Circle burning bright,' along with all its promise; in effect, banality has proved stronger than the forces of the poet's imagination. Despair begins to reassert

[18] Matthew 26: 69-75.

itself as the normal condition of the poem. The direct and forceful interrogative style of the earlier: 'IS THIS FOURTEENTH?' degenerates into typographical chaos: 'Somewhere above Fourteenth TAKE THE EXPRESS / To brush some new presentiment of pain.' The demoralizing effect of 'Quaker Hill' is creeping into the poem as Crane recalls the 'pain that Emily, that Isadora knew!'

As the train rushes on, Crane glimpses a scene through the window; his imagination dramatises what he has seen but he cannot conclude the episode, leaving its meaning disordered like his thoughts. The sadness of the tableau reflects his own anxiety about his journey:

> 'But I want service in this office SERVICE
> I said—after
> the show she cried a little afterwards but—' (Tun, 63-65)

The lines recall Eliot's from 'The Fire Sermon.'[19] Despite Crane's outward rejection of Eliot's pessimism, Eliot haunts 'The Tunnel' in snippets of speech, colloquialisms, allusions, hyphens and ungrammatical capitalisations so that Crane struggles to preserve his poetic identity. In 'The Fire Sermon,' the lover, described as 'the young man carbuncular,' is selfish for 'His vanity requires no response, / And makes a show of indifference' while Crane's 'I' demands 'service.' Eliot's disillusioned woman feels very little: 'Hardly aware of her departed lover; / Her brain allows one half-formed thought to pass: /

[19] Eliot, CP.

'Well now that's done: and I'm glad it's over.' Crane's female is also disillusioned by lust's masquerade as love: 'she cried a little afterwards.' The allusion to 'The Fire Sermon' is a reminder that life is a cycle, replaying again and again: 'And I Tiresias have foresuffered all / Enacted on this same divan or bed.'

The poet does not know if his role is that of Hermes or Orpheus. If he is Hermes, he will lead the reader down into Hades and like Hermes guiding Persephone back, he will try to return with vision. If he is Orpheus, he will fail despite the symbolism of Orpheus's song. Crane's doubts, revealed by his unsettled thoughts, 'Or can't you quite make up your mind to ride,' need to be assuaged by an assurance that his quest is 'right,' but he is preoccupied by his fear of failure, symbolized here by being trapped, like Eurydice, forever in Hades. Poe is the grotesque figure haunting Crane's tunnel; the interrogatives betray Crane's fear that his poetry will share the fate of those doomed to remain underground:

> Whose head is swinging from the swollen strap?
> Whose body smokes along the bitten rails,
> Bursts from a smoldering bundle far behind
> In back forks of the chasms of the brain,—
> Puffs from a riven stump far out behind
> In interborough fissures of the mind...? (Tun, 66-71)

While we learn retrospectively that this is Poe, the verse is packed with mythological references. The present tense implies that this torture is

unending like that of Tantalus, Ixion, Sisyphus and Tityus, who after death endured eternal punishment in the underworld. 'Smoldering' suggests the struggles of the burning imagination and reinforces the idea that the poet's struggles are unending. Although the decapitated head makes a horrific image, for only the head swings from 'the swollen strap,' implicitly mixing the images of strangled tongue and strap, the head symbolizes the mind so that we understand that it is the imagination which is tortured for 'evermore.' The image also refers to one of Poe's stories, The Purloined Letter, which alludes to decapitation through the broken head of the nail and then to the corpse of Mme L'Espanaye. John T. Irwin, in an essay entitled 'A Clew to a Clue: Locked Rooms and Labyrinths in Poe and Borges,' argues that:

> Poe indicates the significance of this head/body separation when he notes that the corpse was so badly mutilated 'as scarcely to retain any semblance of humanity': that is, in the differential relationship that he sets up between head and body, Poe codes the body as nonhuman (lacking 'any semblance of humanity') and thus codes the head as human in opposition – the standard equation of head, mind, rationality, humanity on the one hand and of body, instinct, irrationality, animality on the other.[20]

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[20] Shawn Rosenheim and Stephen Rachman, eds., The American Face of Edgar Allan Poe (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1995) 149.

The power of Poe's image imports the importance of this separation into Crane's poem as well as reinforcing the significance of the imagination. The separation of head and body, suggested by 'Whose body smokes along the bitten rails' also recalls another 'singer,' Orpheus who was torn to pieces. His head was thrown into the River Hebrus, 'to swim the hiving swarms / out of the Square,' while his body fragments were gathered up by the Muses. 'Swinging' echoes 'And somehow anyhow swing—'; both ironically underline the cost of the triumphant ending of 'Atlantis' where 'Whispers antiphonal in azure swing.' The swinging head is also the beat of time, reminding Crane that he must leave 'a subscription praise / for what time slays.' The poetic parallel is that of a place from which no poetic creativity can be wrenched as the poet endlessly journeys, unable to leave the train. Helpless and afraid of losing his poetic identity, Crane's train of thoughts jerks along with the action of the train: 'Whose head is swinging from the swollen strap?' Bewildered by his mythological 'clues,' Crane cannot answer his own question. Only when the answer 'Puffs from a riven stump far out behind,' is it discerned by the poet. 'Riven' is the visual half-rhyme of raven, connoting the famous short story, 'The Raven,' written by Edgar Allan Poe. The poet later apostrophizes Poe as, 'evermore' but 'nevermore' would be more appropriate.

Poe, forever doomed to swing from the hanging strap, is 'a talking dead man' according to Gelpi because of his fixation with death.[21] Gelpi argues that Poe personifies his own psyche as the beloved woman who 'despite her various names' is 'a single image of his doom: his anima expiring young or

[21] Gelpi, Muse 145.

buried alive, leaving him a talking dead man.'[22] Poe's role in Crane's poem is similar to Gelpi's description; he symbolizes Crane's fears about losing his muse. Yet despite Crane's battles with despair throughout The Bridge, hope always strives to overcome hopelessness, ultimately separating Crane's poems from Poe's which, Gelpi asserts, are 'poems of crisis, even hysteria, but the crisis is detached from the continuity of living, as though it hung suspended and encapsulated in the poet's mind.'[23]

Crane's thoughts swing, like the hanging strap, backwards and forwards, recalling, 'Then I might find your eyes across an aisle, / Still flickering with those prefigurations— / Prodigal, yet uncontested now, / Half-riant before the jerky window frame.'[24] On the forward swing, he sees another Helen,whose eyes are 'like agate lanterns.' Despite the poet's memories of an earlier Helen, Crane's experience of Helen in this poem is mediated through Poe's concept of Helen in his first poem, 'To Helen':

> Lo! In yon brilliant window-niche
> How statue-like I see thee stand,
> The agate lamp within thy hand!
> Ah, Psyche, from the regions which
> Are Holy-Land. (11-15)[25]

[22] Gelpi, Muse 145.

[23] Gelpi, Muse 145.

[24] 'For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen.'

[25] Poe, CW.

Poe's Helen, emerging in Crane's poem through 'Your eyes like agate lanterns,' is elusive, because Crane is addressing Poe rather than a muse. Crane's choice of Poe for the disembodied head seems fitting, for, as Gelpi summarizes, 'When we read Poe's lines, the words and images often seem too disembodied or too detached from the ostensible subject or point of reference.'[26] Just as the poet's imagination extended the overheard conversations and the life of the figures noticed through the window, it searches through Crane's directory of images to make associations with other green eyes hovering at the edge of the poet's consciousness. These associations are not simply with green eyes; they also indicate the poet's anxiety about being captive, like Poe, within the tunnel, recalling the lines from 'Cutty Sark' which describe a figure trapped within his own confusion:

> His eyes pressed through green glass
> —green glasses, or bar lights made them
> so—
> shine—
> GREEN—
> eyes—
> Stepped out—forgot to look at you
> Or left you several blocks away— (CS, 3-10)

[26] Gelpi, Muse 143.

Crane's ideal of Helen is seemingly shared by Poe whose second poem, 'To Helen' haunts him through the years:

> ...*Only thine eyes remained*
> *They would not go*—they never yet have gone. (51-52)[27]

Helen, through her legendary stature, is already immortal. '*They would not go*—they never yet have gone' seems to imply that the creations of the imagination survive beyond the physical life of their creators; but here in Crane's poem, it is Poe whose eyes 'would not go,' 'Your eyes like agate lanterns—on and on.' In Crane's thoughts, Helen and Poe intermingle as if the symbols are interchangeable:

> To gain a voice, the writer must become the beloved. Getting into her mind will ensure that his voice gets into her heart. To want to be in the place of another is to be possessed. Or put another way: If you cannot have her, then you can become her.[28]

Crane too, seems to recognize that poet and creation become synonymous; the poet himself acts as a bridge between the external world and his imagination. Yet even while Crane's thoughts assess and combine images,

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[27] Poe, CW.

[28] Rosenheim and Rachman 187.

rocked by the motion of the train, the poet still resists identification with Poe: 'And Death, aloft, —gigantically down / Probing through you—toward me, O evermore.' While the apostrophe pays homage to Poe as poet, Crane does not want to share his fate: 'That last night on the ballot rounds, did you, / Shaking, did you deny the ticket, Poe?'[29] Crane's intense gaze at Poe has condemned him to remain in the underworld.

Having rejected the assimilation, the poet leaves Poe behind through the pun on 'Gravesend,' the spondaic finality of 'dead stop' and the association of 'Chambers Street' with a burial chamber: 'For Gravesend Manor change at Chambers Street. / The platform hurries on to a dead stop.' Crane has survived the journey and begins to return to the surface. Like Persephone, he will have to return again and again, but, unlike Poe, he does not remain for 'evermore.' The poet lifts himself from his personal Hades; 'The intent escalator lifts a serenade / Stilly.' It is intent because Crane must will his return to earth from his own modern Hades and 'stilly' to remind himself of his vow at the end of 'Quaker Hill.' Although 'lifts a serenade' is playing with the idea of the escalator assisting the poet to reach out for his vision, the memory of 'one last angelus lift throbbing throat' implies the command to the poet to 'Arise' is again relevant. The seed has germinated and broken through the surface where it is watered, 'Bolting outright

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[29] Fender believes that these lines 'refer to one theory about Poe's death in Baltimore in 1849, that he was discovered, while drunk or drugged, by a gang of 'repeaters'-i.e. party workers who used to dragoon drunks and other persuadables into voting their 'ticket.' An old man discovered Poe in a tavern on election day1849, and took him to hospital, where he died four days later.' 82.

somewhere above where streets / Burst suddenly in rain.' The promise of 'rush naked back to light' has begun yet the world remains unaware, each eye attending its shoe.'

Instead, Crane is welcomed back by vestiges of familiar, earlier images. 'The Dance' survives in 'Thunder is galvothermic here below,' while 'The Harbor Dawn' hovers around the edge of 'The gongs recur.' 'The River' is captured within the shape of the twisting, meandering lines and implicated through the imagery of the Styx. 'Quaker Hill' is suggested by language, suffering and commitment and the images of blank windows. The train and Crane are both emptier; the train of passengers and Crane of fight: 'And somewhat emptier than before, / Demented, for a hitching second, humps, then / Lets go....' The imagery is that of a dragon, maddened by its captivity, and losing its prey: 'The train rounds, bending to a scream.' The screaming and roaring, and the play on 'demented,' emphasize that the train is a literal 'Daemon'; the rushing, fiery spirit that possesses people and the devil that carries souls into hell, but the phrase, 'Lets go' suggests that the poet and the train wrestle until the train gives up on the struggle. This meaning is emphasized by the freedom of newspaper litter to 'wing, revolve and wing.' The newspapers parallel Crane's braving of the tunnel as passive 'tabloid crime-sheets perched in easy sight' gain a liberty to 'wing' and 'revolve' like the poet's thoughts. This liberty is quickly shown to be illusory; without the transformative effect of the poet's gaze, they are reduced to litter. The train, without the poet to translate its symbolism for us, reverts to a metaphor of need, 'Blank windows gargle signals through the roar.' Crane refutes that blankness by continuing to insist upon confrontation with his devil.

Crane now asks his own question: 'And does the Daemon take you home, also?' which refers back to his earlier statement: 'The subway yawns the quickest promise home.' Here, it is asked of an immigrant woman: 'Wop washerwoman, with the bandaged hair?' who, in her own way, is a female version of Columbus. The 'washerwoman' cleans the subway, an analogy to those who tend and wash the bodies of the dead. The irony of 'O Genoese, do you bring mother eyes and hands / Back home to children and to golden hair?', further questions the hopes invested in her children.[30] 'Cuspidors' is a Portugese word for spittoon, making it seem that Crane is addressing Christopher Columbus, but the poet is also implying that the ancestral dreams are watered down; although the explorer lives on in this descendant, her ambitions stretch to the refuge she seeks in the new land rather than 'Cathay.' Giles sees further connections: 'Just as the *Genoese* washerwoman echoes the nobleman from Genoa, so *cuspidors* is an echo of the line from 'Ave Maria,' 'Sun-cusped and zoned with modulated fire.'[31]

Crane, free of the train's spell, can now assess its purpose. The train is the modern day equivalent of Charon's ferryboat, carrying the dead, but in this poem, its role is much more theatrical for it brings death, in the form of the 'Daemon,' 'Whose hideous laugh is a bellow's mirth.' Crane's fear of the train is revealed in his associations; he compares the sound of its laughter to the murder of the day; by inference, Crane is afraid that the daemon might kill his poems. The poet's fear is emphasised by the way in which he uses the

[30] 'Golden' is suggestive of promise throughout Crane's poetry. According to Concordance, used 21 times in Crane's poetry.

[31] Giles 10.

language of birth to stress the purpose of the train as death–bringer, '...and pack / The conscience navelled in the plunging wind, / Umbilical to call—and straightway die?'

Crane is caught between the soot and steam of the train, caught between doubt and certainty. Poe, imprisoned forever, has undermined Crane's belief in the everlasting life of the imagination. Is the passage through the 'gates of Wrath' a journey of self-delusion or one of worth that requires the questor to commit himself willingly, whatever the price? That commitment is signalled by 'And yet.' Like Lazarus called upwards, out of the cave,[32] Crane reasserts his belief in his poem. He does this in a hymn of recognition, signalled by the apostrophe: 'O caught like pennies beneath soot and steam, / Kiss of our agony thou gatherest: / Condensed, thou takest all.' In the 'Proem' the lights of the bridge 'condense eternity.' Now the metaphorical bridge is itself condensed. Crane recognizes that the bridge, as his symbol of the imagination, causes him to suffer the pain of tortured imagination; but his affirmation that 'Condensed, thou takest all' is undermined by the lower case of 'thou.' When the poet 's eyes are released from the pennies used to weight the eyelids shut after death, described in 'O caught like pennies', the poet will be able to confer the capitalized 'Thou' upon the bridge. Until he can complete his affirmation, he has not fully escaped the malevolent influence of the tunnel, and must continue his efforts, 'like Lazarus, to feel the slope.'

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[32] John 11: 38-44.

The Bridge stresses the need for imaginative death and rebirth, with the poet as the instrument of that renewal. Crane accepted his suffering in 'Quaker Hill' but his fear of poetic death, symbolized by Poe, is evident in 'And Death, aloft,—gigantically down / Probing through you—toward me, O evermore!' This symbolization is emphasized by the echo of Poe's lines from 'The City in the Sea':

> While from a proud tower in the town
> Death looks gigantically down.[33]

Crane fears over-reaching but does not want to end captive with Poe, where both will remain 'Impassioned with some song we fail to keep.' The poet, like Moses leading the Israelites through the Red Sea, has brought his poem through the darkness to light, evidenced in 'A sound of waters bending astride the sky':

> And the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea upon the dry *ground*: and the waters *were* a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left. [34]

Crane's poem is divided by East and West rather than right and left. He has passed through the 'Gates of Wrath' and found his 'western path' back to

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[33] Poe, CW.

[34] Exodus 14: 22.

Brooklyn Bridge and to the River, the symbol of his quest. The tugboat becomes Crane's metaphor for his quest as 'wheezing wreaths of steam,' it 'Lunged past, with one galvanic blare stove up the River.' Memories of the earlier sections of The Bridge are acknowledged in his tribute: 'I counted the echoes assembling, one after one, / Searching, thumbing the midnight on the piers.' Like the watcher on the train, Crane observes the life around him in 'Lights, coasting, left the oily tympanum of waters; / The blackness somewhere gouged glass on a sky.' This blackness is transposed from the 'Proem,' 'Only in darkness is thy shadow clear' but it has been hardened and tempered until it cuts like a diamond, 'gouging glass.' Crane will make other journeys away from the temporal world of time and its 'ticking towers.' Despite the affirmation of 'Unceasing with some Word that will not die...!' the quest has witnessed similar swings from hope to despair and back to hope again. In consequence we know that Crane's faith will crumble again but paradoxically, that the poet's faith will reassert itself. The poem ends in a form of 'goodbye' that is a salute:

> And this thy harbor, O my City, I have driven under,
> Tossed from the coil of ticking towers....
> Tomorrow,
> And to be... (Tun, 129-131)

The salute will become a hymn of praise in 'Atlantis' but Crane takes time for pleasure in the contemplation of his bridge as he remembers his hopes in his

'Proem,' 'Here at the water's edge the hands drop memory' which echoes Eliot's lines in 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock':

> There will be time to murder and create,
> And time for all the works and days of hands
> That lift and drop a question on your plate.[35]

The poet's mood is one of acceptance; he can do no more. His poems are set loose upon the water; 'Shadowless in that abyss they unaccounting lie.' The dual meaning of 'lie' echoes the poet's plea to Maquokeeta in 'The Dance,' 'Lie to us'; but Crane has tried to complete his task of following his star:

> Under the mistletoe of dreams, a star—
> As though to join us at some distant hill—
> Turns in the waking west and goes to sleep. (HD, 37-39)

'Here by the River that is East,' Crane must trust to his poems to do his work, or fail, as they will, 'How far away the star has pooled the sea— / Or shall the hands be drawn away to die.' The poet's search for inspiration, which will culminate in 'Atlantis' has extracted its price from him:

> Kiss of our agony Thou gatherest,
> O Hand of Fire

[35] Eliot, CP.

gatherest—

(Tun, 136-138)

But this is still a chorus of affirmation because poetic agony is part of the process of poetic creativity, exemplified by 'The Dance.' 'The Tunnel' ends on a similar note to 'The Fire Sermon' but the emphases of the two endings are different. While Crane's lines are inclusive through 'gatherest': Eliot's lines stress expulsion:

Burning burning burning burning
O Lord Thou pluckest me out
O Lord Thou pluckest

burning,

The final repetition of Crane's mantra 'Kiss of our agony Thou gatherest' and the capitalized 'Thou' define and name the theme of The Bridge.

3 'Atlantis'

'Atlantis' is a poem of reward; its style is reverential but celebratory, a hymn to the bridge as a divine symbol. 'The Tunnel' ends on a dash that endstops the poem's last descending lines, suggesting that the poem has taken the poet as far as possible; and that only Crane can decide to step out into the unknown. The location of that ending implied that the poet is by the waterside; the title of

this final poem implies that the legendary island is submerged beneath the 'River that is East' which leads to the Atlantic. The epigraph suggests that the idealized world of Atlantis will merge into Crane's contemporary world through the knowledge gained from the quest.

Forward movement throughout The Bridge often incorporates a correspondingly downward direction, but here the poet enters the poem by lifting his eyes towards the 'arching path / Upward' which sets the tone of the poem from the beginning. This upward movement at the beginning of the poem is also a justification of the journey throughout the poem; despite the number of descents in the earlier sections, Crane's quest ends on an upward note. The poet has ridden 'the Circle burning bright' and returned to where he started, but his perception has been altered by his quest. 'Atlantis' is the result; an accolade to the poet's courage that reflects what the poet wants to see. The quest has not transformed the world, for 'no ideals have ever been fully successful on this earth' but the poet has proved worthy of his task. With the realization that the possibilities of this quest are ended, the bridge is seen as the symbol of the poet's courage. Although the bridge is the symbol of transformation throughout, in its combined physical and metaphorical qualities, in this final poem it is the bridge which is transformed. The poet's will is imposed upon his own symbol; the poet's imagination can itself be felt in 'The whispered rush, telepathy of wires / Up the index of night, granite and steel.' Without that vision, the bridge is only 'granite and steel.' With it, the bridge is a translucent, gleaming edifice, 'Transparent meshes—fleckless the gleaming staves.' 'The whispered rush' transforms earlier images, too; the distorted images of 'Cape Hatteras' are reformed into shimmering musical

testimonies to the bridge; the overstrung energy of 'Taut motors surge, space-gnawing, into flight' is released into the musical as the poem moves 'Upward, veering with light, the flight of strings.' Taut but shivering, as if with excitement, the bridge itself is an Eolian harp with strings made from 'Taut miles of shuttling moonlight.' However, there are jarring notes; the strings 'syncopate.' The tone tries to tell us that Crane has arrived at the end of his quest; but while the poem works hard to substantiate the quest's success, Crane's language betrays his knowledge, based upon his experience in the other poems, that his victory is momentary in 'Sibylline voices flicker, waveringly stream.' 'Waveringly' captures the goal of the quest which seems to shift within the poems but not the poet's commitment. Crane tries to prolong his 'moment' by striving to confirm the bridge's spiritual dimension, 'As though a god were issue of the strings...' 'As though' is a reminder that Crane is aware that such a perception is his own imaginative connection. The Bridge's quest is over. All that remains for the poet to do is to sustain his triumph in order to persuade the reader of the redemptive properties of The Bridge. In line twenty-six of 'Proem: To Brooklyn Bridge' Crane asks rhetorically 'How could mere toil align thy choiring strings!' Crane's poem does not answer this statement; instead, its choiring song of celebration veils the question.

Musical images are used to celebrate the bridge and to drown out any doubts. The poet's will is brought to bear; by addressing the bridge as a song, the poem itself becomes a song of praise. To underline that music and The Bridge are synonymous, many of the images in 'Atlantis' are musical: the bars

become printed music, embellished with 'octaves' in 'And on, obliquely up bright carrier bars / New octaves trestle the twin monoliths.'

Recalling Whitman, who claims in lines 172-173 in 'Starting from Paumanok,' 'I will not make poems with reference to parts, / But I will make poems, songs, thoughts, with reference to ensemble,'[36] Crane implies that 'music' or poetry, results from the poems that make up the metaphorical bridge. Like 'Powhatan's Daughter,' which interweaves erotic experience with the search for inspiration, 'Atlantis' contains a sexual journey which follows an 'arching path / Upward' until Crane reaches 'The loft of vision, palladium helm of stars.' These descriptions are much sharper and more glittering than the fog-insulated images of 'The Harbor Dawn', as if Crane's experience has been tempered in the fires of 'The Dance' and hardened by his travels through the poems. The poet's earlier sexual encounters are part of the journey; this last journey will take Crane beyond the physical to 'planet-sequined heights.' The sexual implications of 'whispered rush' suggests Crane's exhilaration at attempting this last quest.

Language is part of this task; it unifies, gathering in the earlier sections with the image of rope in 'through the cordage, threading with its call / One arc synoptic of all tides below.' 'Cordage', used twice in 'Atlantis,' and once in 'Ave Maria,' is emblematic of the imaginative tie that stretches between the beginning and end of the poem. The imagery works hard to assert harmony by emphasizing union, 'So seven seas answer from their dream.' The tone is one of mock-Miltonic, hyperbolic sonority, emulating 'Paradise Lost' where the

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[36] Whitman, CP.

lines roll majestically onwards. Yet underneath the glorious rhetoric of celebration, aggrandized by 'labyrinthine mouths of history,' 'black embankments' still lurk:

> Their labyrinthine mouths of history
> Pouring reply as though all ships at sea
> Complighted in one vibrant breath made cry,—
> 'Make thy love sure—to weave whose song we ply!'
> —From black embankments, moveless soundings hailed,
> So seven oceans answer from their dream. (At, 11-16)

Crane's second use of 'though' signals his awareness of how internalized his bridge is. When language fails him, Crane constructs his own words; 'Complighted' is a Cranian word that, like 'transmemberment' in 'Voyages I,' combines both positive and negative meanings. The word unites 'all ships at sea' yet challenges that unity through 'plight.' However inclusive Crane makes his statement, as when he writes, 'So seven oceans answer from their dream,' the idea of 'weaving' and 'plying' and 'shuttling moonlight' reveals Crane's part in imposing this triumph upon the poem. Despite these anxieties, Crane determinedly continues his hymn with 'And on.' The poet attempts to convince us of the bridge's harmony by gathering in references to the other poems and trying to making them unitative, even the negative ones. The ambiguous line from 'The Harbor Dawn,' 'Sing to us, stealthily weave us into day', is almost transformed into the positive 'Make thy love sure—to weave whose song we ply.' The line is not completely transformed; Crane reminds

us that he is driving the poem to its conclusion but the poem resists a total triumph. 'Black embankments' has a starkly unadorned finality after 'Only in darkness is thy shadow clear'; the idea that 'the hands drop memory' serves the poet's purpose. By making a plain black border of the water's edge around his bridge, the poet brings the bridge into sharply glittering relief.

The poem's night setting, transferred from the previous section, is also part of this contrast. Crossing from 'The Tunnel' to this poem has occurred within the instant of the poet's eyes swinging between 'the midnight on the piers' and glancing 'up the index of night.' In 'The Tunnel,' night is necessary to create a calm, natural opposition to the harsh artificial lighting of the subway; here the blackness makes a background for the poet to celebrate the shimmering brilliance of his bridge. If this darkness contains a metaphorical darkness, it is hidden within the vibrating light, sound and energy that charges the air around the bridge so that we hear 'Taut miles of shuttling moonlight syncopate / The whispered rush,' 'humming spars' and 'Some trillion whispering hammers.' The overall effect is of a poem filled with noise and life. Crane fights very hard against a downward movement but cannot hide his knowledge that his celebration is transient, 'And like an organ, Thou, with sound of doom.' Because the poet, the 'floating singer,' cannot prevent his glorious song of celebration fading into 'Whispers antiphonal in azure swing,' he must construct the means to make the transition positive while inevitable.

This positive nature is suggested by the celestial imagery which emphasizes the perfection of Crane's bridge:

Onward and up the crystal-flooded aisle

White tempest nets file upward, upward ring
With silver terraces the humming spars,
The loft of vision, palladium helm of stars. (At, 21-24)

Crane's use of 'white'[37] highlights the bridge's flawlessness; whatever lurks beneath, it cannot compromise its purity. Williams also uses the word's associations in part two of Book Two of Paterson: 'and no whiteness (lost) is so white as the memory of whiteness.'[38] 'Silver,' 'loft of vision,' and 'stars' are emblems of the poet's desire for transformation through his 'Word.' The bridge is also a symbol of protection, spelled out by its 'palladium helm of stars.' The palladium is the statue of Pallas Athena which Zeus flung out of Olympus; Ilus, King of Troy, built Troy's great temple of Athena where it landed.[39] The statue was believed to have the power of keeping safe the city that possessed it; the line implies that the bridge has the power to protect but that there is something to be protected from. Giles noting this layering of meaning, observes that 'what it is essential to stress is how Crane exploited actual, verbal puns to assist his verbal bridgings between different eras and between different sections of his long poem.'[40]

By reintroducing Helen at several removes, the poet acknowledges that beauty can cause discord even when that beauty represents the 'loft of vision.' Yet despite this awareness, the poet cannot resist listening to echoes of the

[37] According to Concordance, there are 50 references to 'whiteness' in Crane's poetry.

[38] Williams, P.

[39] Cassell's Dictionary 579-580.

[40] Giles 8.

past, 'Tomorrows into yesteryear.' This quest is over; 'Atlantis' is the savouring moment before the poet returns to another 'Proem' and sets off again, always searching for the 'sheer' truth with eyes, which, like the seagulls, are 'stung with rime.' These echoes help keep alive the poet's desire to quest; even the echoes of the earlier poems in The Bridge act as pinpricks to motivate Crane; the memory of the 'hiving swarms' in 'The Tunnel' prompts the poet briefly to imagine himself as Jason, 'Still wrapping harness to the swarming air.' The transposed images reiterate the endless circle, replayed again and again from the 'labyrinthine mouths of history': These hurried glimpses of the past, as they come to the fore, transform the noise of the modern-day bridge; traffic noise disappears to leave only the rushing sound of the wind to remind Crane of 'Some trillion whispering hammers,' anticipating 'Whispers antiphonal.' There, under the bridge, the poet clearly hears the silence of long ago, 'Serenely, sharply up the long anvil cry / Of inchling aeons silence rivets Troy.' Crane, through the pictures of the past that he creates, is demonstrating the power of the bridge to inspire. The poet's language is his testimony to that power, evidenced by the symbolic light, colours and irridescence that illustrate this power: 'gleaming,' 'bright,' 'crystal-flooded,' 'silver,' glistening,' 'planet-sequinned,' 'glimmer,' 'silvery,' 'Sheened harbor,' 'iridescently upborne,' 'bright drench,' 'white escarpments,' 'ripe fields,' 'glittering,' 'blinding cables,' 'silver sequel,' 'radiance,' and 'rainbows':

> And you, aloft there—Jason! hesting Shout!
> Still wrapping harness to the swarming air!

> Silvery the rushing wake, surpassing call,
>
> Beams yelling Aeolus! splintered in the straits! (At, 37-40)

The language also betrays frustration. Jason, 'wrapping harness to the swarming air!' is seemingly controlling the air but it is an illusion. The poet, in a similarly fruitless way, tries to harness his poem, but the poem resists any imposed ending, 'Beams yelling Aeolus! splintered in the straits!' Jason represents a warning about quest; legend says that he was crushed to death by a beam, falling from the rotting carcase of the Argo.[41] Crane uses Greek mythological reference throughout The Bridge to illustrate the aspirations of its 'heroes'; the poet's own quest makes him part of the brotherhood who seek and always ultimately fail. From them, Crane takes solace, encouragement and comfort. By saluting them, the poet salutes himself. By recording their failures, he acknowledges his own. Paul Mariani recognizes self-doubt in the midst of triumph:

> At last, having willed the annihilation of time and space in that sidereal infinity, bleeding starlight as in some cosmic crucifixion of the world. And yet to be left wondering whether the vision he has been vouchsafed holds any truth at all.[42]

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[41] Cassell 440.

[42] Paul Mariani, The Broken Tower: The Life of Hart Crane New York: Norton, 1999) 197.

Mariani grasps the crux of why the quest is more important than the goal as the familiar pattern of ascent and descent emerges. Giles reads 'Atlantis' as an apology for imposing meaning upon the bridge as the poet;

> asks the Bridge's pardon for imposing upon it patterns of objective history , but he also apologizes for imposing the patterns of his own subjective story (*history*: 'his/story')....In this way, 'Atlantis' can be seen as perpetually wavering between epic grandeur and autobiographical lament.[43]

In 'Atlantis' the poet tries to keep hold of success by determinedly gazing upwards but his eyes betray him by constantly seeking out the past so that he can judge himself against his mythical peers. The poet's eyes are guided upwards by the bridge supports and, as they arrive at the top, look towards eternity, 'up planet-sequinned heights.' Crane blurs the barriers between past and present so that he can range through both. Here, the present is compressed until the poet is forced through the division between now and then, by 'towering looms that press / Sidelong with flight of blade on tendon blade / —Tomorrows into yesterdays.' Yet even within the gravity and density of imagery that Crane feels appropriate to pay homage to his subject, the poet's language makes a personal contribution by describing the quest in the terms of the writer:

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[43] Giles 168.

—and link

What cipher-script of time no traveller reads

But who, through smoking pyres of love and death,

Searches the timeless laugh of mythic spears. (At, 29-32)

The 'smoking pyres of love and death' are also part of the scenery of 'The Dance' as well as a reference to Dido while 'the timeless laugh of mythic spears' is an allusion to earlier poets such as Whitman and Poe and indicates the power of the pen. The poet must reconcile success and failure as integral parts of his Bridge. Doubts and anxieties demand as much effort from the poet as striving for success because defeat is part of the quest. By constantly emphasizing timelessness, Crane stresses that each failure begets the opportunity for another attempt. From the beginning of The Bridge, Crane has advocated the power of the word as the 'unfractioned idiom, immaculate sigh of stars.' Crane's references are always premised upon the power of 'language to build 'bridges' but the rest of the quotation also applies, 'itself is inevitably as fluid as always.'[44] The movement through The Bridge is also fluid; like 'The River' in 'Powhatan's Daughter,' it 'spreading, flows—and spends your dream.' 'Atlantis' celebrates the inevitability of that course and the potential of that dream.

Eternity is described through life played out again and again, 'Like hails, farewells.' These replayings also gather in Crane's other poems like a miniature journey through White Buildings and the sections of The Bridge:

[44] 'General Aims and Theories,' CPSL 223.

From gulfs unfolding, terrible of drums,
Tall Vision-of-the–Voyage, tensely spare—
Bridge, lifting night to cycloramic crest
Of deepest day—O Choir, translating time
Into what multitudinous Verb the suns
And synergy of waters ever fuse, recast
In myriad syllables,—Psalm of Cathay!
O Love, thy white, pervasive Paradigm...! (At, 41-48)

The pattern of Crane's poetry is proclaimed here in the search for 'Cathay,' 'Love' as his 'paradigm,' and the power of the 'Word.' The poet's response to his bridge in 'Atlantis' completes the journey through the text, validating or negating earlier responses. That journey, represented as a quest, is a movement towards self-knowledge; it purports to lead Crane onwards to an understanding of what the bridge represents. Where, in 'Voyages,' Crane pursued the muse across the page as a device to inspire himself, here the bridge is the symbol of inspiration, 'O Thou whose radiance doth inherit me.' The material bridge disappears after the 'Proem,' forcing the poet to set out in search of its meaning - the 'one song [that] devoutly binds' although Crane's understanding of 'Love' and its pattern, 'thy white pervasive Paradigm' remains constant throughout his poetry. The ellipsis that follows 'Paradigm' here, mimics Crane's mind ranging back through the past as his eyes range over the bridge.

The emphasis on circularity suggests the poet's eyes ranging round the bridge; through their clockwise sweep, Crane can retrace his journey. 'Psalm

of Cathay' transports the poet back to 'Ave Maria.' 'We left the haven hanging in the night' recalls the beginning of the journey begun by Columbus:

> Slowly the sun's red caravel drops light
> Once more behind us....It is morning there—
> O where our Indian emperies lie revealed,
> Yet lost, all, let this keel one instant yield! (AM, 13-16)

'We left the haven' also recalls the ending of The Great Gatsby. Like F. Scott Fitzgerald, Crane has described a world in need of redemption. The moment of retrospection is emphasized by an inversion, 'Sheened harbor lanterns backward fled the keel.' 'Ave Maria' began the quest, 'Atlantis' marks its end; both past and present journeys have ended in the same place, leading Crane to acknowledge time as changeless, where the same actions are played out, again and again:

> And still the circular, indubitable frieze
> Of heaven's meditation. (At, 53-54)

'Atlantis' is an admission that all quests replay the same journey; the poem ends where it started, back at Brooklyn Bridge. The 'indubitable frieze' suggests that the bridge is preserved like the 'still unravished bride of quietness' of the first line of Keats's poem, 'Ode on a Grecian Urn.'[45] The

[45] Keats, SP.

symbolic bridge is generated by Crane's imagination; this particular moment of vision will never change, like the carvings on the urn in lines 21-22, 'Ah, happy, happy boughs! That cannot shed / Your leaves, nor ever bid the Spring adieu.' 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' dwells on the pathos of the human condition; the power of the poem lies in the recoil it creates when the reader, lulled into believing its scenes, faces realization. Crane's belief in his bridge is not a passive surrender to art; the poet has always associated the stillness of his bridge with choice, '*Some motion ever unspent in thy stride,— / Implicitly thy freedom staying thee*!' He understands the value of his bridge as the symbol of his imagination which can be articulated again and again. Crane sums up such a premise in his 'General Aims and Theories' essay, 'New conditions of life germinate new forms of spiritual articulation.'[46] Unlike Keats's 'Grecian Urn,' Spring, with all of its redemptive possibilities, returns each year to Crane's bridge, where 'The vernal strophe chimes from deathless strings.'

The reference to 'strings' brings Crane's mind back to his bridge which he addresses with reverence: 'O Thou steeled Cognizance whose leap commits.' The 'leap,' the arching out over the river, is perceived as an act of faith that is rewarded by restoration, 'The agile precincts of the lark's return.' The bridge is not a god but a representation of man's need to demonstrate his 'reverence for deity.'[47] Its value lies in its power to inspire; it can lead man to greatness, even if he is the sum of his senses: 'Sight, sound and flesh Thou leadest from time's realm / As love strikes clear direction for the helm.' 'Love'

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[46] CPSL 222.

[47] CPSL 239.

is not capitalised in this line because it refers to the sentiment rather than the bridge but it is still positive as it strikes 'for the helm,' instead of 'fled the keel.'

The power of the bridge lies within its power to motivate and Crane describes it within this concept: 'Swift peal of secular life, intrinsic Myth / Whose fell unshadow is death's utter wound.' Like Donne's tenth Holy Sonnet,[48] 'Death be not proud,' faith lives on beyond death in this poem, too. The bridge cannot prevent suffering, the cities 'sustained in tears' are part of man's experience and, as in 'The Dance,' suffering is part of the 'sweet torment' that is life; the price paid for 'ripe fields / Revolving through their harvests.' The life-transfiguring properties of the imagination are shown in the move beyond passivity - to an acknowledgement that the imagination is the seat of worship for Crane because it can transform the 'panoramic sleights' into a 'cycloramic crest.' 'Voyages' only gave us a glimpse of possibility; in 'Complete the dark confessions her veins spell.' The Bridge completes that possibility: 'Through the bright drench and fabric of our veins.' It also confirms 'Recitative,' 'Then watch / While darkness, like an ape's face falls away, / And gradually white buildings answer day.' The promise of the 'Proem' is finally fulfilled as 'white rings of tumult, building high' merge into 'white escarpments swinging into light.'

The bridge is 'Forever Deity's glittering Pledge' and each new song of faith reinforces this in the line, 'Whose canticle fresh chemistry assigns / To wrapt inception and beatitude.' [49] Crane calls attention to this sense of

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[48] Donne, CP.

[49] Crane uses the same pun in 'Voyages II,' line 5; 'Laughing the wrapt inflections of our love.'

continuation by developing 'wrapping'; 'Still wrapping harness' becomes 'To wrapt inception and beatitude,' as well as recalling 'the wrapt inlections of our love' in the second 'Voyages' poem. The same promises are made throughout time: 'Of thy white seizure springs the prophecy: / Always through spiring cordage, pyramids / of silver sequel,' reiterating Crane's description of the bridge, in his 'Proem,' '*Terrific threshold of the prophet's pledge.*' As the poet continues to fulfil the promises of his poems, answering '*How could mere toil align thy choiring strings!*' with 'Kinetic of white choiring wings...ascends,' Crane's 'though' disappears into the certainty of 'through.'

The bridge is fully realized as '*lending a myth to God*,' 'Unspeakable Thou Bridge to Thee, O Love.' Giles reads 'Atlantis' as the poem in which:

> the capitalist metaphors merge into pathetic fallacy and become a means of imposing provisional order upon the world:
>
> Now while thy petals *spend* the suns about us, hold—
>
> Like spears ensanguined of one *tolling* star
> That *bleeds* infinity...
>
> It is as if the star were 'bleeding' (extorting money from) infinity, imposing a charge or 'toll' upon the infinite darkness and so

> requiring infinite darkness to bow to the star's financial demands.[50]

Yet Crane has always made obvious his acceptance of his world; his poem 'Chaplinesque' declares 'For we can still love the world, who find / A famished kitten on the step.' The capitalization of Crane's addresses to his bridge emphasize its connection to divinity but his recital is also an incantation against the loss of his symbol: 'Thy pardon, Flower, Answerer, Anemone.' Anemone is 'literally, daughter of the wind but the poet emphasizes her eternal nature with 'Now while thy petals spend the suns about us.'[51] Aelous, the god of winds, is her father; the poet uses the reference as an amulet to protect against past danger: 'Beams yelling Aeolus! splintered in the straits!' Crane's petition is answered by his understanding of the bridge's purpose, an understanding that answers the appeal first made in 'Proem':

> *O Sleepless as the river under thee,*
> *Vaulting the sea, the prairies' dreaming sod,*
> *Unto us lowliest sometimes sweep, descend*
> *And of the curveship lend a myth to God.* (TBB, 41-44)

In the second 'Voyages' poem, Crane acknowledges the temporality of vision in 'Close round one instant in one floating flower.' Empowered by his discovery of his bridge 'whose radiance doth inherit me,' Crane asks for

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[50] Giles 39.

[51] Fender 87.

longer, 'Atlantis,—hold thy floating singer late!' In 'The Tunnel,' Crane suggested a connection between himself and Orpheus, here the connection between song and poetry is strengthened. The 'floating singer' suggests Orpheus, with his 'orphic strings' but Crane is also the 'floating singer' of 'Voyages.' Jack Wolf argues that 'Atlantis' is proof of Crane's Orphism, because of the many references to Orpheus[52]:

> Like spears ensanguined of one tolling star
> That bleeds infinity—the orphic strings,
> Sidereal phalanxes, leap and converge: (At, 90-92)

However, Crane uses many other mythological references, too, which sometimes cross-reference Christian and poetic references such as the spear. The spear is an important symbol in 'Atlantis,' 'spears ensanguined' is a reference to the bloody death of Orpheus, a symbol of Christ's Crucifixion, as well as a continuation of the torture of Poe in 'The Tunnel.' 'One tolling star / that bleeds infinity' recalls 'The Dance':

> And one star, swinging, take its place, alone,
> Cupped in the larches of the mountain pass—
> Until, immortally, it bled into the dawn. (Dan, 25-27)

'Sidereal phalanxes' describe the tightly arranged battalions of the rails of the bridge, their position determined by the apparent motion of the stars. All of

[52] Wolf 142.

the images fuse together to complete Crane's purpose: 'One Song, One bridge of Fire! Is it Cathay?'

All of Crane's long poems are investigations of inspiration. In The Bridge, the bridge itself is the emblem of inspiration. The poet of The Bridge moves towards an understanding of the power of belief as a permanent tribute to the imagination, 'thine Everpresence.' The circle completes and continues; certainty becomes uncertainty, then back again. As Giles, concurring with Butterfield, states:

> As Butterfield has said, all Crane's themes are finally linked together in 'Atlantis': seagulls, serpent, star, eagle—all these images the reader has come across in The Bridge are now unified within this final vision. For example, the poem's penultimate line 'The serpent with the eagle in the leaves...? integrates the back-yard snakes in 'Van Winkle' with the Indian totem in 'The Dance' ('The serpent with the eagle in the boughs') and so provides both internal bridging, the coherence of literary form, and philosophical or external bridging, an acknowledgement of how different cultures reincarnate themselves in similar ways.[53]

Yet as 'Atlantis' was the first poem to be composed unity is an illusion, imposed retrospectively by Crane. The poet has lied to us and 'danced us

[53] Giles 13.

back to the tribal morn'; we start again, 'is it Cathay.' The tone deliberately accentuates the discrepancy between solution and eternity, 'Now pity steeps the grass and rainbows ring / The serpent with the eagle in the leaves...?' The question mark implies that although this poem is ended, the next is in the wings. The music of Crane's finale reduces to 'Whispers antiphonal in azure swing.' Ormsby recognizes Marlowe in this line:

> 'Marlowe's mighty line' resounds again and again throughout Crane's best work; indeed, that sonorous and stately, largely iambic measure remains one of Crane's distinguishing stylistic traits. Even the final line of The Bridge—'Whispers antiphonal in azure swing' with its interwoven *a* and *w* sounds—echoes Marlowe's line from Dr. Faustus: 'In wanton Arethusa's azure arms.'[54]

Pocahontas, the bridge's female personification, quietly and unassumingly steps forward to take her bow.

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[54] Ormsby 1-2.

Chapter 7

After The Bridge

'You who desired so much—in vain to ask—
Yet fed your hunger like an endless task,
Dared dignify the labor, bless the quest—
Achieved that stillness ultimately best.' (TED, 1-4).

Crane's poem, 'To Emily Dickinson,'[1] is about the pain of being a poet. In it, Crane makes statements that apply to himself as well as Emily Dickinson, nowhere more so than in the implication that suffering is an essential part of the creative process. Throughout the long poems, suffering strengthens the poet as he tries, like his hoboes in 'The River,' to 'touch something like a key perhaps.' The terms that Crane uses to address Dickinson are familiar; they echo those found in his own poems: 'bless the quest,' 'love to bind,' and 'the harvest you descried and understand.' Whitman is also echoed with 'singing that Eternity possessed.' Their cumulative effect is to summarise Crane's career.

Giles describes Crane's poetic career as having four distinct phases, although the lines between the stages are not as clear-cut as he asserts. As always with Crane, boundaries blur because of intertextuality:

[1] 'Key West' Folder Subsection. This poem composed between November1926 – *c.* June 1927.

> If we were to describe the arc of Crane's career, we might suggest four main phases: the wilful solipsism of his early poems, with their 'white milk, and honey, gold love' (to quote from 'The Hive') where exquisite aesthetic experiences are preserved in an 'Interior' away from the world's 'jealous threat and guile'; a conflict between the solipsism and the external world in White Buildings; the effort to insert the poet's uncertain voice into a public context in The Bridge; and the abdication of the ego and triumph of an obdurately inhuman landscape in 'Key West' and the Mexican poems.[2]

Chronologically, the poems do not fit into categories. To assess the poetry apart from the long poems, I have chosen to examine 'O Carib Isle' and 'Royal Palm,' and the poet's struggle to remain creative in a tropical environment. Both poems were composed while Crane was writing The Bridge; they are not later poems.[3]

'O Carib Isle' begins with a statement, but dashes imply that each image is an idea rather than a worked line. The first two lines resonate with implications of death, drawn from the combined image of tarantula and rattlesnake, the funeral lily, the 'feet of the dead' and 'laid' which connotes 'laid out.' The images seem familiar; the 'shell shucks' and 'fragments of baked weed' have survived from 'Voyages I,' but the poet who dared to 'cross the line' is part of the washed-up debris. The mood of the poem implies that the poet is no longer in control of

[2] Giles 155.

[3] According to Marc Simon, 'O Carib Isle' composed and revised *c.* end of August 1926—*c.* late May 1931. 'Royal Palm' composed *c.* July 1927—*c.* late December 1927.

words which 'shift, subvert / And anagrammatise your name.' Crane's name is found in 'nacreous' and 'brine-caked' and, as Giles points out, disintegrates within 'hurricane':

> The poet is cast within the flow of the hurricane verbally as well as thematically: CRANE is disintegrated inside hurricane. Human character is diminished to alphabetical fragments, a series of letters across the page. CRANE undergoes the indignity of constant metamorphosis.[4]

While the image of 'The tarantula rattling at the lily's foot / Across the feet of the dead, laid in white sand / Near the coral beach' seems to proclaim an awareness of the failure of vision, it also reinforces the insistence of life. 'Key West' dwells upon this insistence by contrasting images of death and fossilization with the natural landscape.

The poem is also 'laid out', taking the form of thoughts rather than statements. 'And yet suppose' emphasizes the random nature of thought while the broken syntax between the second and third stanza adds to this:

> And yet suppose
> I count these nacreous frames of tropic death,
> Brutal necklaces of shells around each grave

[4] Giles 146-147.

Squared off so carefully. Then

To the white sand I may speak a name, fertile
Albeit in a stranger tongue. (OC, 8-120)

'May speak,'emphasized by the gap, suggests uncertainty, further emphasized by 'Albeit in a stranger tongue' which implies that Crane fears for his fluency with words. This impression is underlined by the dried-up landscape which Crane uses to great effect. As Williams puts it in the third part of Book II of Paterson, the effect is of 'the language worn out.' However, it is an effect created from Crane's skilful manipulation of suggestion, and ironically proves the poet's power.

The landscape is a prison which enervates the poet and leaves him helpless so that he is forced to entreat: 'But where is the Captain of the doubloon isle / Without a turnstile.'[5] The identity of the 'Captain' is not specified but the echoes of Whitman's 'O Captain! My Captain!' affect the mood of the poem and promote the feeling of finality and death that lurk here:

O Captain! my Captain! our fearful trip is done,
The ship has weather'd every rack, the prize we sought is won,
The port is near, the bells I hear, the people all exulting,
While follow eyes the steady keel, the vessel grim and daring:

[5] In similar vein, Ormsby writes 'Hart Crane plundered and ransacked the English language, especially the diction and vocabulary of the Elizabethans, like a buccaneer let loose in the royal treasure chamber.' 1.

But O heart! heart! heart!

O the bleeding drops of red,

Where on the deck my captain lies,

Fallen cold and dead.[6]

Hart often punned on 'heart' in his letters so the triple repetition of 'heart' is apt. Eric Ormsby, commenting on the name change of Harold to Hart, declares that the shortened version allowed Crane to exploit 'all the plangent and sentimental double-entendres this new moniker entailed'[7].

'Doubloon isle' suggests that the Captain was a pirate while the 'turnstile' implies the commercial aspect of the world of the longer poems. The poem does not make clear if the Captain is Crane (fearful of losing his imaginative authority) or if the Captain's desertion is necessary to emphasize the loneliness of the isle. The absence of the turnstile effectively imprisons Crane and locks the world out. This image is supported by the fossilized remains, destined to remain forever, that litter the poem as 'nacreous frames of tropic death.' Whispers of earlier poems add to the museum feel: the wreckage of 'Voyages I,' the phrases, 'And yet suppose' and 'the eyes' baked lenses' recall 'And yet, suppose some evening I forgot,' and the 'baked and labeled dough' of 'For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen.' 'Each daybreak on the wharf' reworks the dawn dock scene in 'The Harbor Dawn,' where 'a truck will lumber past the wharves'. 'Brine caked eyes'

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[6] Whitman, CP.

[7] Ormsby 4.

are all that remain of the 'seal's wide spindrift gaze toward paradise' from 'Voyages II.' Hurricane and thunder are reminders of 'The Dance'. The 'lithic trillions' of stillborn poems in the 'Southern Cross' section of 'Three Songs' have solidified into a 'carbonic amulet.' Harold Bloom argues that 'the poet [writing quest-romance] takes the patterns of quest-romance and transposes them into his own imaginative life, so that the entire rhythm of the quest is heard again in the movement of the poet from poem to poem.'[8] Crane's later poems, without the quest motif, still use this pattern of repeating images but they are reduced to echoes. Their effect is to suggest that the poems are shadows of the longer poems.

Crane's former attempts to harness inspiration depended on the attempted possession of a female muse. This muse always remains 'other' and external unlike Wallace Stevens, 'the blue's comedian host,' of line 26[9], who internalises his muse in 'Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour':

> Out of this same light, out of the central mind,
> We make a dwelling in the evening air,
> In which being there together is enough.[10]

Because she is his 'interior paramour' Stevens never clothes her in Crane's bodily description of his muse. In contrast, Crane's long poems are erotic,

[8] Bloom, PI 20.

[9] Stevens, CP. Alludes to 'The Comedian as the Letter C.'

[10] Stevens, CP.

describing perception and reaction in voluptuous terms to emphasize physicality. For Crane, physical sensation is part of the journey process and the goal is only sighted when the poet moves beyond his sexual desires. While the poems strive to move beyond sexuality, its importance in the cycle of inspiration is never denied.

This eroticism, associated with life and creativity in the longer poems, is missing from this poem where only 'catchword crabs' patrol 'the dry groins of the underbrush.' The poems betray an exhaustion and rely on reworked images, both Crane's and other poets' but the pun on 'catchword crabs' exposes the poet ordering his poem, by 'catching words' and exploiting them. Here, in 'death's brittle crypt,' Crane persuades us that he is burned out by the 'sere of the sun.' 'For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen' and 'Southern Cross' suggested that the diurnal world destroyed the world of the imagination; 'Key West's' epigram, the Introductory poem to Blake's 'Songs of Experience,' supports this:

> The starry floor,
> The wat'ry shore,
> Is given thee 'til the break of day. (18-20)[11]

Crane's use of Blake's lines implies that his voice is the voice of the bard, as if he too has heard:

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[11] Blake, CP.

The Holy Word

That walked among the ancient trees,

Calling the lapsed soul

And weeping in the evening dew—

That might control

The starry pole

And fallen, fallen light renew. (4-10)

As the island waits for the relief of the hurricane, 'syllables want breath,' implying that the poet is searching for words. The effect is one of exhaustion. Crane is no longer willing to risk himself for the earlier possibilities of quest as he declares 'Let not the pilgrim see himself again / For slow evisceration bound.' The poet is caught and trapped in the heat of the day where imagination is bleached out by the sun. Scarlet flowers are described as blood clots while the poet is melted down into the black and white of print: 'Let fiery blossoms clot the light, render my ghost / Sieved upward, white and black along the air.' Even shelter is described in terms of disease: 'No, nothing here / Below the palsy that one eucalyptus lifts / In wrinkled shadows—mourns.' These lines are uncaring; 'nothing here / mourns' as if the isle itself is exhausted. Crane promotes this image by merging into the landscape and using 'I' and 'my' to share the isle's stagnation.

Crane also uses interrogatives to promote the idea that he is lost and adrift. In the fourth stanza, he asks four questions: 'Where is the Captain,' 'Who but catchworld crabs / Patrols the dry groins of the underbrush,' 'What man' and 'What is commissioner of mildew throughout the ambushed senses?' Where, in 'Voyages IV,' the poet willingly entered the sea, accepting that he 'Must first be lost in fatal tides to tell,' he now describes himself as 'cast within its flow' as if he is denied choice. The poem exposes Crane's fear that his poems will not live beyond him, a fear, fittingly for a poet fascinated by the sea, revealed in 'Legende':

> And even my vision will be erased
> As a cameo the waves claim again. (Lege 10-11)

The poem successfully creates a landscape of exhaustion. Like Baudelaire, Crane knows and names Satan, but this poem ends with a bang not a whimper as Crane produces an assertive ending that contradicts Eliot's. In 'The Hollow Men,' the fifth section of Eliot's poem concludes with a chant:

> *This is the way the world ends*
> *This is the way the world ends*
> *This is the way the world ends*
> *Not with a bang but a whimper.*

Crane's poem ends with the line, 'Sere of the sun exploded in the sea.' The pun on seer suggests that it is the poet who bursts, but the past tense of 'exploded' divides that action from the present of this poem where the poet's thoughts 'Congeal by afternoons here, satin and vacant.' The poem implodes, rather than explodes as the isle is internalized.

In contrast to 'O Carib Isle,' 'Royal Palm'[12] is full of life. Its title recalls Andrew Marvell's lines in 'The Garden': 'How vainly men themselves amaze / To win the palm, the oak or bays.' 'Green rustlings' calls to mind 'a green thought in a green shade'[13]:

> Green rustlings, more-than-regal charities
> Drift coolly from that tower of whispered light.
> Amid the noontide's blazed asperities
> I watched the sun's most gracious anchorite. (RP, 1-4)

The tree ascends, like Crane's aspirations for his Bridge. The image of the poet anchored in reality but 'gazing toward paradise' is captured in the palm soaring toward the skies, but rooted in the earth. In a similar fashion to the poet gazing toward his goal through his poems, the palm climbs 'up as by communings, year on year.' Irony enters the poem with the alliterative 'Forever fruitless,' and remains in puns that echo 'Voyages II.' Instead of 'The seal's wide spindrift gaze

[12] 'Key West: An Island Sheaf,' CP.

[13] Marvell, CP.

toward paradise,' Crane describes how 'till our deathward breath is sealed— / It grazes the horizons.' The 'transmemberment' scene of 'Voyages III' poem also echoes here, 'beyond that yield / Of sweat the jungle presses with hot love / And tendril till our deathward breath is sealed—.' This dash mimics the dash that follows 'this single change—.' Like the effects in 'To Emily Dickinson,' the poem suggests that the poet is looking backwards, yet the cool tower of the trunk, contrasting with the lethargic heat of the day, reaches skyward in a movement that promises that the poet still gazes 'toward paradise.'

The poem ends with the tree, 'launched above / Mortality' leaving those without imagination behind. The final line of The Bridge is reworked; 'Whispers antiphonal in azure swing' is broken into 'whispered light' and 'azured height.' The poem's last statement, 'As though it soared suchwise through heaven too' reverberates with memory. Its sound echoes the sounds that Crane hears in his bridge, 'As though a god were issue of the strings....'

These poems along with 'The Broken Tower,'[14] are supreme examples of how Crane makes fine poetry out of collapse. Marius Bewley describes 'The Broken Tower' as one of the most difficult poems Crane ever wrote:

> ...its images come to life only when we realize that they are the sheerest verbal integument for a meaning that perfectly informs every word and metaphor in the ten quatrains.[15]

[14] 'Poems Uncollected but Published by Crane' CP.

[15] Trachtenberg 150.

The carefully controlled suggestion of these poems, in contrast to the overarching themes of the longer poems, gives Crane licence to marshall the connotations that his critics find so difficult.

* * * *

While Crane's place in the American cannon is assured, reaction to him has been problematic, as his poetry has been evaluated against the changing concerns of the times. In a chapter entitled 'Hermeneutic Models,' Bloom asks:

> Why, despite diversity of cultures, changing times, evolving ideologies—why do readers so often agree upon the interpretation of a literary work of art? My tentative explanation is that every literary text contains certain subliminal components that guide the reader towards a single stable interpretation of that text.[16]

Interpretation of Crane's poetry has provoked less discussion than classifying it. Earlier criticism was mixed, the arguments centred around New Criticism and perceptions of Crane's Romanticism. Yvor Winters, who names himself an absolutist in the foreword to In Defense of Reason, and as one who 'believes in the existence of absolute truths and values' and in the 'duty of every man and every society to endeavor as far as may be to approximate them,'[17] judges a

[16] Bloom, Rimbaud 145.

[17] Winters 10.

poet's ability on technique and subject. In his review of The Bridge, he accuses Crane of not expressing his theme in objective terms, of not writing poetry 'about' something. New Criticism's prescriptive boundaries exclude Crane whose objectives are spiritual rather than concrete. Although Crane calls himself an 'absolutist,' from which it is possible to infer that he is attempting to arrive at some form of absolute knowledge, the poet's words deny this:

> It may not be possible to say that there is, strictly speaking, any 'absolute' experience. But it seems evident that certain aesthetic experience (and this may for a time engross the total faculties of the spectator) can be called absolute, inasmuch as it approximates a formally convincing statement of a conception or apprehension of life that gains our unquestioning assent, and under the conditions of which our imagination is unable to suggest a further detail consistent with the design of the aesthetic whole. I have been called an 'absolutist' in poetry, and if I am to welcome such a label it should be under the terms of the above definition.[18]

R.W.B. Lewis understands Crane's absolutism through these words; Crane is not attempting 'to articulate an absolute vision' but 'striving to show the familiar world transfigured and enshrined and so, poetically speaking, redeemed—yet still

[18] CPSL 219-20.

familiar, still our world.'[19] Crane's statement stresses that 'absolutism' and imagination are intertwined; only when the imagination can no longer expand an experience, can it be considered 'absolute.' For Crane, 'absolutism' is potentially nihilistic if it eliminates possibility and he was sure enough of his talent to defend himself to Winters: 'I write damned little because I am interested in recording certain sensations, very rigidly chosen, with an eye for what according to my taste and sum of prejudices seems suitable to-or intense enough-for verse.'[20] John Unterecker records that even while Crane was discouraged by his poem's reception 'he never repudiated The Bridge, the integrity of its design, the validity of its theme.'[21]

Allen Tate, according to Crane, 'posits The Bridge at the end of a tradition of romanticism.'[22] Tate argues that once sensation is removed from Crane's poetry, only 'dead abstraction' remains[23]: 'A poetry of the will is a poetry of sensation, for the poet surrenders to his sensations of the object in his effort to identify himself with it, and to own it.'[24] While acknowledging 'the special quality of his mind' that 'belongs peculiarly to our own time,' Tate asserts 'His aesthetic problem, however, was more general; it was the historic problem of

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[19] Lewis 420.

[20] LHC 246-7.

[21] Unterecker 623.

[22] LHC 352-353.

[23] Tate 33.

[24] Tate 40.

Romanticism.'[25] William Carlos Williams's aims were similar to Crane's but he was not castigated in the same way. In her introduction to Interviews with William Carlos Williams, Linda Welshimer writes:

> Williams wanted to reach people because he saw so many sterile, impoverished lives: poetry, art, beauty might somehow ease those terrors. [26]

Crane's implied intention, of revealing beauty to his readers, acknowledges that reality is only a form of subjective perception: 'a kind of retinal registration is enough, along with a certain psychological stimulation.'[27] The poet's explanations were to no avail, ultimately. Crane is condemned by Tate for his perceived part within a tradition. In later readings, instead of disagreements about the text being too Romantic, the argument has altered to whether or not the poems are homosexual texts. Giles reads The Bridge as a text which functions on two levels; as a search for vision and a confession of homosexuality:

> ...Crane's subversive *double entendres* imply how The Bridge is secretly a homoerotic idyll ('the lover's cry'), but also how the poet's

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[25] Tate 26.

[26] Linda Welshimer Wagner, ed., Interviews with William Carlos Williams: Speaking Straight Ahead (New York: New Directions) xv.

[27] 'General Aims and Theories,' CPSL 220.

> search for personal freedom becomes equated with America's search for the visionary continent of Atlantis.[28]

Giles bases his judgements upon the secret puns which he believes run throughout The Bridge as coded clues. Yingling claims 'the trick in reading Crane, and what amounts to his investment in the problem of language, is that none of these meanings (and one hesitates to use such a teleologically tainted word) is final, better, or even "right."'[29] Ormsby, on the other hand, feels that 'much that "gay studies" critics make of Crane's "double" nature sounds forced. Crane's despairing sense of the irreconcilable in life does not inevitably reflect only his homosexuality, as such critics like to claim. Heterosexuals too may be tormented by "the love of things irreconcilable."'[30]

Crane resists restrictive definition because his poems cross barriers; in consequence he resists labelling. While he is a Romantic, Lynn Keller's description of the Modernist tradition reduces the gap between Modernism's aims and Crane's Romantic ones: 'The modernists were conscious of participating in a sweeping aesthetic revolution, and their ambitions for poetry were immense. They seemed willing to dare anything both in technique and in vision, believing that—despite the artist's separation from society at large—changes in the arts could transform people's conceptions of themselves and their world, perhaps

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[28] Giles 174.

[29] Quoted in Ormsby 7.

[30] Ormsby 5.

ultimately transforming society.'[31] He might also be named a Symbolist, according to Kermode's definition in Romantic Image: 'Nearly all the Symbolists supposed that they were finding again something that had been lost, or that they were merely the first people to be fully conscious of something that was in fact necessary to all great art.'[32]

Influence is more important than definition. Crane always learns from other poets; like many poets of his generation he was influenced by the French Symbolists. Mallarme's words, quoted by Bates, explain Crane's use of compressed metaphor:

> To *name* an object is largely to destroy poetic enjoyment, which comes from gradual divination. The ideal is to *suggest* the object. It is the perfect use of this mystery which constitutes symbol. An object must be gradually evoked in order to show a state of soul; or else, choose an object and from it elicit a state of soul by means of a series of decodings.[33]

Crane attempts to 'touch the keys' of his readers through his use of language, particularly compressed metaphors, but this too has proved controversial.

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[31] Lynn Keller, Re-making it New: Contemporary American Poetry and the Modernist Tradition (Cambridge NY: Cambridge UP, 1987) 9.

[32] Frank Kermode, Romantic Image (London: Routledge, 1966 107-8.

[33] Milton J. Bates, Wallace Stevens: The Mythology of Self (Berkeley: U of California P, 1985) 138.

Richard Blackmur asserts that The Waste Land, the Cantos, and The Bridge all fail in similar ways and condemns them 'in composition, in independent objective existence, and in intelligibility of language.'[34] Sutton interprets Blackmur's stance thus: 'Blackmur asserts, as a principle of poetic language, that "when a word is used in a poem it should be the sum of all its appropriate history made concrete and particular in the individual context."'[35] By this definition, the poet's metaphors are not effective. Crane's juxtapositions and his lack of logical connections (in a grammatical sense), the feeling that Crane is used by, rather than using language are all at variance with Sutton's understanding of Blackmur's stance. Blackmur, for all his objections, understands the importance of suggestion:

> There was, for example, no logical or emotional connection between thresholds and anatomies until Crane verbally juxtaposed them and tied them together with the cohesive of his meter. Yet, so associated, they modify and act upon each other mutually and produce a fresh meaning of which the parts cannot be segregated. Some latent, unsuspected part of the cumulus of meaning in each word has excited, so to speak, and affected a corresponding part in the others.[36]

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[34] R. P. Blackmur, Language as Gesture: Essays in Poetry (London: Allen, 1954) 301.

[35] Sutton 140.

[36] Blackmur 310.

Just as Crane remakes memory in order to re-grasp his moments, he remakes some language to act as his tool in this process; his supposed 'faults' reflect critics' inability to recognize the poetry's richness of suggestion. It is a poetry that ranges from rhetoric to colloquialism so that a poem's mood can move between rapture and the everyday language of his age.

Crane's poetry requires the reader to follow him through the poem, absorbing allusions. Bloom argues that 'Crane is a great master of transumptive allusion, of achieving poetic closure by a final trope that reverses or sometimes even transcends both his lyric's dominant figurations and the poetic tradition's previous exploitations of these images.'[37] Crane's Romanticism with its pattern of using symbolic images without suggesting their interpretation, is at odds with his own Modernist age of empirical analysis. Sutton argues that this differentiation postulates two truths: 'With this idea of "two truths" they have contributed to an aesthetic mystique, according to which the truth of art is apprehended immediately through the contemplation of the aesthetic symbol or icon.'[38] Crane's letters imply that he understands science as his imagination's enemy yet he also tries to 'spiritualize' the machine: 'The function of poetry in a Machine Age is identical to its function in any other age; and its capacities for presenting the most complete synthesis of human values remain essentially immune from any of the so-called inroads of science.'[39]

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[37] Bloom, Gnosis 255.

[38] Sutton 99.

[39] 'Modern Poetry,' CPSL 261.

While early critical reception has misunderstood Crane's purpose, criticism in later years has been more positive, accepting that Crane, as Jennings writes, 'could not create an ordered world but only release into words, sometimes into rhetoric, his inner world; and this world was a world of torment.'[40] R. W. B. Lewis and Sherman Paul have put forward the argument that Crane's work needs to be judged on its own merits and not as evidence of the failure of Romanticism. This difference between intent and result is paralleled in early critical appraisal of The Bridge; Vogler points out in Preludes to Vision that criticism is based on 'an alleged understanding of Crane's purpose in writing the poem, and in each case the poem is classified as a failure because, for a variety of reasons, the poet failed to achieve his purpose.'[41] His second understanding is that the poem is deemed to have failed because of Crane's lack of faith but he argues that this is precisely the force that motivated Crane to write it. The 'failure' of the contemporary world of the poems imitates the failure of life without imagination, a life dependent on absolute knowledge.

Roberts, discussing the hostility which 'modern' poetry aroused, notes:

> Much of that hostility has now vanished: it is seen that these poets were saying things which were true, and important, and which could not be said as well in any other way.[42]

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[40] Jennings 224.

[41] Vogler 145.

[42] Roberts 1.

Yet this hostility still exists. James Fenton makes valid points about our changing understanding of values:

> With all the arts, when we first come to them, we are likely to be taught that such and such an object—a building, painting or book—represents one of the supreme achievements of its kind. Years later perhaps, we begin to realise that, while we were in no way being deceived by our teachers, the values with which we were imbued were themselves, at some stage created....Learning these facts about the history of taste should not leave us bereft of any sense of values in the art, but it makes us aware that our values have a history.[43]

This is inarguable but he then dismisses Crane utterly: 'Hart Crane, who had great prestige as a damned soul, seems to me, generally speaking, a posturing fool.' While Fenton's criticism reflects the modern view that taste is the result of contemporary conditioning, he ignores the fact that critics judge from a viewpoint that represents their own experiential sense of reality. Paul Mariani is an example of this; his biography of Crane[44] interprets the poet's life so personally that, as Ormsby snipes, 'he is loomingly present on every page, often

[43] James Fenton, 'Chapter and Verse on Reputation,' The Guardian 26 July. 2003: 20.

[44] Paul Mariani, The Broken Tower: The Life of Hart Crane (New York: Norton, 1999).

interweaving Crane's words with his own or putting words into Crane's mouth.'[45] Mark Ford, reviewing Clive Fisher's account of Crane's life, labels his review 'Rimbaud, without the brains' as he both praises and condemns:

> Crane tends to be labelled as American poetry's answer to both Rimbaud and Keats....Yet Crane lacked Rimbaud's steely intelligence and instinct for self-preservation. Like Keats he devoted himself to poetry with a rapturous, exhilarating earnestness, believing his epic, The Bridge, would both justify his life and redeem the tarnished promises underpinning the myth of America.[46]

Ford also states that 'Crane never expounded his poetic theories in literary essays or manifestos, as Eliot and Pound did.' Although he acknowledges Crane's 'brilliant letters' there is no mention of 'General Aims and Theories.' This devalues Ford's opinion.

Combs summarizes more fairly because he assesses what Crane's work achieves: 'Carrying the honesty of the Romantics in introspection further than it had ever gone, he faced and recorded the inevitable failure of his own "language experiment."'[47] This experiment, built upon the hope and courage that sustains

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[45] Ormsby 8.

[46] Mark Ford, 'Rimbaud, Without the Brains,' rev. of Hart Crane: A Life, by Clive Fisher, The Guardian 3 Aug. 2002: 7.

[47] Combs 36.

the poet, needs the assent of the reader and a willingness to 'suspend disbelief' to unlock the coherence that familiarity with the texts brings. Crane's best readers press his text too carefully, if this is a fault. Unterecker captures best what Crane is trying to achieve:

> Perhaps we are becoming those readers. For most of the poem's recent critics accept the mosaic plan of the work, discovering beneath its 'fragmented' surface an extraordinary coherence. Perhaps, indeed, we are becoming what Crane looked for and could never find: an audience delighted by relationship, by interconnection, by radiant, harmonic wholeness.[48]

[48] Unterecker 624.

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